A BOTTLE IN THE SMOKE

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HE WAS SEATED AT THE ORGAN, WITH PASSIONATE EYES UPLIFTED IN AN AGONY OF RENUNCIATION.

A Bottle In The Smoke

Cooke Don-Carlos



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"For I am become like a bottle in the smoke."

PSALM CXIX.

"READERS who please to go along with us into this poor *Jocelini Chronica* shall wander inconveniently enough, as in wintry twilight, through some poor stripped hazel-grove, rustling with foolish noises, and perpetually hindering the eyesight; but across which, here and there, some real human figure is seen moving: very strange; whom we could hail if he would answer; — and we look into a pair of eyes as deep as our own, *imaging* our own, but all unconscious of us; to whom we, for the time, are become as spirits and invisible!" — CARLYLE'S "Past and Present."

A Bottle in the Smoke.

CHAPTER I.

"I did renounce the world;
Its pride and greed,
Palace, farm, villa, shop;
Trash — such as these poor devils
Have given their hearts to,
All at eight years old."

BROTHER JOCELIN smiled as he traced the beautiful letters of the Missal he was illumining, and softly sang King Knut's song —

"Merrily sang the monks,
While merrily rowed the King,
And all the birds did also sing,
And tell their loves
'Twas spring — 'twas spring!"

He was low of stature, and dark of eye and complexion, with clear-cut features of singular beauty and his hands and sandaled feet were small, and white, for Brother Jocelin was a limner, and so, free from those menial tasks which fell to the lot of the uneducated monk. He wore the usual dress of the Benedictines — the loose black robe with its obtuse, oval hood and plain scapular; and, as the sunlight streamed upon him through the narrow casement, he seemed to absorb all its brightness; his picturesque figure strangely at variance with its bare environment; for the Scriptorium of St. Edmund's Abbey was scantily furnished with a

carved desk and stool, and naught else, save a great ebony crucifix on the wall, inscribed "Beholde my meekness, chylde, and leave thy pryde." As if this monk stood in need of warning against the pride of life, and the rush of warm blood in his young veins.

It was spring, and he was but twenty. When the spring sun shines, and the buds burst forth as if called into being by the birds' songs, the hearts of Earth's young creatures, everywhere expand and throb, and glow in the stir and warmth of Nature's revival. Jocelin was weary of the dim cloisters, of the drone of prayer and chant, and to-day a mad impulse urged him to fling aside his black robe and go forth into the bright world of camp and court; to do deeds of great emprise, to win fame, and the love of some pink-cheeked maid; and to live a man's life in a man's world. The song died away, and he sat idly gazing through the open casement.

The pear trees were blooming in the Abbey garden, and the sunshine seemed wooing each blossom's white breast from beneath its vernal zone. The apple trees spread their lacy boughs beside the delicate pink tracery of the plum. A white-throat chirped her nestlings to sleep in a gnarled oak which stood at the end of the long pleached walk; and the light, filtering through the tender green of young leaves, everywhere flecked the stone pavement with bits of brightness. Beyond the walk, stretched a colonade extending the Abbey's entire length and through the arched openings white and black robed monks hurried to and fro, unmindful of the beauties so near them. Above all, towered the grim, gray walls of Bury St. Edmunds

with many an arch, rounded belfry, deep-set window and grim gargoyle; massive, stern and strong — a testament in stone of the power of Rome in England.

The Abbey lay along the eastern slope of the town of St. Edmunds, a town of no mean size in itself.

Its embattled walls with four grand gateways, enclosed fully sixty acres, containing many buildings and court-yards, besides gardens and cemeteries. The buildings, including three chapels, the Chapter house, the Ambulatory and the Infirmary, huddled about the church, like small children at a mother's knee. Behind these, to the west, was the empty house of the Master of Horse, for once the Abbey had maintained several score of fighting horsemen. The humble cots of Cellarer, Seneschal and Clerk were near by, in front of the long, low line of stables along the southern wall; and enclosing a spacious courtyard was Bradfield, "A certain solemn mansion," the residence of the Abbot, and often used by the King himself. This completed the Abbey settlement, save for a high tower which stood far down by the northern wall, overlooking a forest. It stood there grim and mysterious, with its low, iron-spiked door, widely placed ollietts, and deep-set, narrow windows high up toward its conical roof. This was the Abbey prison, and, (some said), torture house. Dark tales were whispered of it in St. Edmund's town, and the solitary herdsman passing on his way home at twilight, shuddered and crossed himself, thinking its shadow crept over the wall to follow him.

The revenues of the Abbey were great, and her holdings formed a whole county in themselves, yet insatiable, she

stretched her fingers into other Hundreds, and her scattered carucates of land were many, and fifty advocates, or feudal knights, with their hundreds of vassals, did her homage, headed by the renowned Adam de Cokefeld.

But it was not of the wealth or greatness of the Abbey, nor of the fair scene before him, that Brother Jocelin thought. He had forgotten it and his monastic life, and was thinking of his early childhood, in St. Edmund's town; of the low raftered house of his father, Magister Wilhelm, in the narrow little lane of Brakelond, just outside the Abbey wall, and he saw the long, bare room where his father taught. Magister Wilhelm was Master of the Schools, with a few sons of the Abbey-vassals for pupils, but the school was mostly filled with young indigent clergy who, unattached to any monastery, came hither to obtain the learning for which they were unable to pay.

Such being the general financial status of his scholars, and his allowance from the Abbey being small, it was not to be wondered at that Magister Wilhelm's family were destitute, when little Jocelin had pulled his father's coat in vain, one winter's twilight, and vainly called him to their scanty supper of oaten gruel; till the frightened wife had come hurrying in, to find the poor scholar dead and cold over his *Ovidius Naso*. Thus the widow of the Master of the Schools found herself and her small children in poverty, scarcely relieved by a scanty daily dole from the Abbey.

When Jocelin was eight years old, being accustomed to running in and out of the Abbey kitchen for the soup and bread on which they existed; what with having lived among wandering friars, inferior clergy, and the monks of Bury,

his head was full of legends of angels and saints. And one night, lying on his little pallaisse, he dreamed that Satan, with black wings spread wide, descended before a great stone building to fly off with him. Then he cried to St. Edmund for help, and the good Saint appeared and took him by the hand; whereupon the Devil flew away. His cries awoke his mother, and she pondered on the awful dream through the night. On the morrow, being a devout woman, she took him to St. Edmund's shrine, that she might pray over him and ask guidance of the monks.

"It was just here that St. Edmund touched me, mother," said Jocelin as they passed through the Abbey gate. After some talk with the Prior, little Jocelin was admitted into the Abbey and left by his mother, as was young Samuel of old; and thus, at the age of eight he renounced "the world, the flesh and the Devil."

"Ah," mused Brother Jocelin, leaning his head on his hand, "such a dream was easily interpreted by the monks. Otherwise, I might now have been bearing arms under Sir Adam, a right valiant squire, instead of dreaming over an antiphonary, a vapid monk; and who knows if fortune and St. Edmund had not interfered with my fate, but I might have borne my grandsire's Norman crest upon a knightly shield?"

"But," (hastily crossing himself, as he glanced at the crucifix with its warning text), "doubtless the brethren were right. Diabolus, with out-spread wings was the pride of life, the pleasures of this vain world, '*Voluptates hujus sæculi,*' which would have borne me — who knows whence, if St. Edmund and the Prior had not made a monk of me!"

And he sighed, as he laid by his unfinished task, for the shadows had lengthened as he mused, and ere he had set his painting tray to rights, the refectory bell summoned him to the evening meal.

CHAPTER II.

"At the meal we sit together
'*Salve tibi*'
I must hear wise talk
Of the kind of weather,
Sort of season, time of year.
What's the Latin name for parsley?"

THE refectory was a noble wainscoated hall, lighted from above, with a stone bench around two sides. In front of the arched entry door, above the wainscoating, was a pictured Christ, to which, on entering, Jocelin made the usual obeisance. At the left of the hall was the ambry where stood the massive golden grace-cup, and nearby was the niche, wherein were kept the ewer and basin with which the novices laved the hands of their elders.

A great table stood in the center of the room, with a smaller one near the window, through which food was passed from the kitchen. On one side was the Bible-stand where, as Jocelin moved to his place near the head of the table, a blushing young novice was reading the evening lesson, in very bad Latin.

Lent was over, and the table was therefore bountifully spread with oaten cakes, wine and huge trenchers full of a smoking stew. "Made of my pet calf," mumbled John O'Dice, as he shook his white head over the portion served him in a burnished platter.

"By our Lady, the Sub Prior hath a most infidel spite at me, Brother Tristian", (this to a little weazened monk,

with sallow face, and red wisps of hair bristling around his tonsure), "never was special favorite of mine in the cattle pen but that he sendeth it to Richard of Hennan to butcher, an' right glad Ric seems to do it," (scowling at the burly Richard, who sat farther down the board wielding his knife as if it had been a cleaver). Pale, sneering-faced Brother Walter broke in peevishly, "Now, now, John O'Dice, thou'rt ever grumbling at naught. For what dost thou tend the Abbey herd save for the very end which befell thy calf? It makes a savory mess, in truth, and methinks I would scold less, or eat less."

These low-voiced remarks were covered by the drone of the reader's voice, being subdued in fear of reprimand for speaking while the lesson was under way. Jocelin, (because he was the Prior's favorite) sat at the Sub Prior's right hand, and though that worthy saw fit to reprove the young monk for tardiness, several special dishes were sent to him; and indeed there was much passing of food from the Sub Prior's end of the table to the eaters farther down the board.

The meal was presided over by an aged monk. He directed the novices in their serving, and when they had passed the trenchers and filled the cups, they seated themselves at their own table, to sup of what remained in the dishes.

The Sub Prior, *a pretentious ignoramus*, desirous of making a show of learning, entered into a conversation with Jocelin about the flowers he was painting in the Missal; miscalling them frequently, confusing their botanical names, and Jocelin answered him but absently, being still in the muse into which he

had fallen over his work. But the Sub Prior was satisfied with his display of erudition, and did not notice the inattention. When he had concluded, Jocelin roused himself to inquire of the condition of Abbot Hugo, who, grown blind and old, kept his chamber in Bradfield house.

"My young frere, he grows no better," answered the Sub Prior, "and I fear me things fall worse and worse for our house. Debt increases. The Jews refuse to advance more moneys, (save at ruinous rates), and alas, it seemeth to me that those of the Father's household are but flattering time-servers, who, beguiling him with lies, profit by his infirmities." (In a lower voice he went on). "We loose our power in St. Edmundsbury — our own Stowe; an', by our Lady, 'twas only yestermorn when our Cellerarius, trying vainly to collect the repselver, was forced to seize (throughout all the town) stools, kettles, or household wares, in lieu of the refused reaping penny. And beshrew me an' he was chased, yea, my brother, *chased* through the streets by a crowd of yelling beldames, who belabored him most soundly with their distaffs. *Ora pro nobis*! We are coming upon bad times. Twenty years agone their hag heads would have graced the town walls, for such resistance of our Lord's authority. The field-husbandry are short in their rents to the Reve, the dyers and weavers pay but a small tithe of their allotted tax, and even the fund for lighting our holy Saint's shrine" (crossing himself as he spoke) "falls short of that of last year. Yea we are coming upon bad times, as thou may'st see; though certes, on *thy* young shoulders falls little of the burden which resteth on mine!" And the Sub Prior

nodded his leering head, and squared his fat shoulders pompously though, in fact, he had nothing whatever to do with the administration of the Abbey affairs; his duties being limited to a certain guardianship of the Scriptorium, and the seneschalship of buttery, kitchen and refectory, shared in common with palsied old Hugh, the third Prior.

"Has Brother Samson not yet returned?" asked Jocelin.

"Ah, the Norfolk Barrator! He lies in the tower where our Lord Abbot hath sent him. Didst not know that he failed in his mission to Rome, and that Geoffrey Ridel hath been given the Woolpit church? He sits there in foot gyves awaiting the Abbot's pleasure, and there are whispers of banishment to Acre." The Sub Prior detailed this news with peculiar relish, for Brother Samson was unpopular with most of the easy-going, careless monks. being an austere, taciturn person, who exhorted them, to less self-indulgence, and who condemned *openly* (as most of his brethren did in secret) the ruinous policy of the Abbot.

Hugo had tried in vain to overawe this stern critic and had punished him more than once to subdue his haughty spirit. Then, to placate him, he made him Sacristan, and finally Librarian, but Samson, perfect in the performance of these functions, neither thanked him, nor ceased denouncing the bankruptcy of the Abbey.

"A doubtful man," querulously said the infirm old Abbot to the Prior. "Severity cannot break, nor kindness soften him." So they sent him to Rome, and having failed in his mission, he was punished in the arbitrary manner of the times. But whatever he might be to Abbot

and monks, he was the beloved master of Jocelin's school-days and he received the Sub Prior's news with lowering brow, eating no more of his goodly food. As soon as the meal was over, and the monks had marched from the refectory, singing a psalm, he seized his unemptied cup, and poured the wine into his leathern flask; then placing it with some food in his wallet, he went into the garden. Taking his way furtively in the flower-scented twilight, falling about the great stone buildings, (where bats flitted in and out the turrets, and owls hooted softly from some far off bell tower), Jocelin walked for some time, and then climbing cautiously, he mounted the Abbey wall, and, some yards farther, came to the prison. The vesper bell had begun to toll, as he swung himself lightly against the tower, and by getting a perilous foothold on projecting stones, aided by a sturdy creeper which wreathed its front, he at last raised himself to the level of a deep-set, grated window.

"Brother Samson," he called, but there was no answer, save the deep breathing of a sleeper, which told that the worn-out traveler had thus forgotten failure and punishment. Taking the food and wine from his wallet, Jocelin pushed them through the grating, and scrambling down, was soon back in the Abbey chapel, leading the droning vesper chant; his mellow notes rising high and clear above the rougher tones of the brethren in the "*Ave Maria.*"

CHAPTER III.

"Death, with frosty hand and cold,
Plucks the old man by the beard."

THE inmates of the Abbey, roused from their slumbers by the tolling of bells, were assembled in their various chapels at the Nocturnal service. The rain was falling heavily, drearily, outside, and the drone of the sleepy chanters mingled with the low rumble of thunder. As the last "*Kyrie*" was sung in the chapel of our Lady, the big Abbey bell boomed out solemn and deep. The praying monks rose from their knees, and stood looking at one another with whitening faces. It was not an alarm, nor a call to the church. Slowly, slowly it tolled, ringing sadness to every heart, and they knew by its sound, that in the stately mansion of Bradfield, the soul of their father Abbot had passed out into the stormy night.

To one man, far off in the cold blackness of the prison tower, the Abbot's death knell brought many and varied thoughts. Brother Samson had small respect for his superior, for the Abbot was a weak man, of little learning, who owed his Abbotship to the favoritism of King Henry. and who for many years had governed most inefficiently. Samson had no love for weaklings; of Norfolk breed, he was possessed of a sturdy strength of character that no cowl could subdue. Early entering St. Edmunds as a novice, on becoming a monk, he had departed to the great schools of Paris, and from thence to Rome, in both centers

of learning, winning fame for his Abbey, and commendation for himself.

At the age of forty-five he had returned, to find Hugo in the place of his friend and master, Abbot Gaunarius, and the Abbey sunk into a slough of debt; deserted by the learned monks he had known, and filled with idle, ignorant men. The buildings were out of repair, many valuables stolen or lost, and only half of the Advocates, true to their allegiance. The monks feasted and caroused; eating flesh and breaking other rules of the order. Rents remained uncollected; no horsemen were maintained; the whole Abbey evidencing the direst neglect and abuse, while its Abbot, like a frightened hen in charge of ducklings, tried vainly to rule his idle, rebellious monks, finally retiring to Bradfield, whence he held lax sway over the disorganized Abbey. And deeply in debt to the Jews, who were clamoring for their rights at the very gates, Abbot and Prior signed paper after paper, reduced the living fund of the Abbey, and borrowed more and more each succeeding year.

So while the bell tolled, the Norfolk monk thought bitterly upon these things. "Roger, the Prior, will make such another Abbot as Hugo, and I doubt not it is on him the choice will fall; an' were I out of this vile prison, wherein I am so unjustly confined! — But of the dead naught but good!" he murmured, and checked his angry musings with a prayer for the repose of old Hugo's soul.

Loving his Abbey, and jealous of its fame, of aggressive nature with great executive ability, Samson was feared and hated, and nicknamed "Barrator," or, "Quarreler." But his ability and strength were not unrecognized. The

monks long since had reached the conclusion, by arguing from occasional empty stomachs, and knowledge of the increasing Abbey debt, that if things were allowed to continue on the same basis, no roof would be left to cover them, and, forced to become friars, they would have to wander over the country, precariously living on alms; and the most of them realized that it would take a strong hand and clear brain to set things aright. And so already the tide was turning in Samson's favor, when Prior Roger summoned the Sub Prior, Jocelin, and some of the elder brethren to the Abbot's house before Nocturnal, with the news that the Abbot was dying.

Just at midnight the watchers around his bed heard the aged prelate murmur "Peace, peace, at last!" And the Prior bending over him, found the old man dead, with a smile on his face. The body dressed in full pontificals, was stretched on a bier, with blazing waxen tapers set around it, and the bell was tolled, that the monks might know the Abbey of St. Edmund was orphaned. These services performed, the Prior and Sub Prior departed, leaving Jocelin in charge of Bradfield house; where, surrounded by weeping servants and praying brethren, he passed the night beside the bier; while the Prior sat until morning writing the news to various prelates, and dignataries of the church.

The day broke gray and chill. While Jocelin still watched; and Samson mused in his prison house, the monks, after Prime, talked in the refectory among themselves of the election of a new Abbot.

"Now, it seems to me, Brother Tristian," said John

O'Dice, "that if the Prior is set in our dead Abbot's place—Mary rest his soul! we will go on eating less and less until we will die of hunger. The Sub Prior, as thou knowest," with a grimace of dislike over the name, "beshrew me, is but an Abbey Lubber, with no more learning than thou or I, so what doth our house for an Abbas?" Brother Tristian answered slowly, with the hesitating manner of one who speaks seldom. His shrill voice attracted the attention of the others who stilled their talk to listen.

"Brother Jocelin remains the only learned one amongst us, save Walter, the Medicus. Aye, we are fallen into bad times; as the Sub Prior said last eve at meat. I remember when we had ten limners and fifty monks of the schools amongst us. Jocelin is the only one fitted for Abbotship."

"Peste!" ejaculated Brother Walter, "a popinjay of twenty! Thou forgettest Samson. St. Edmunds cannot be Abbotted by one so young."

"Nay, nay," growled Richard of Hennan, and the other monks voiced their approval of his sentiments; leaving the morning meal in groups of two and three, still discussing who should fill the Abbot's place; while the dead man lay decked with jeweled miter and garments, the crook in his right hand, and the guttering tapers paling about him in the cold morning light. Upon the wall, above his bier, was painted the martyrdom of St. Edmund, and below this a carved figure of the angel Michael supporting a scroll, whereon was inscribed in letters of gold —

"Earthe oute of Earthe ys wondorly wrought.
Earthe hath gotyn uppon Earthe a dygnyte of nought!
Earthe uppon Earthe hath set all hys thought.
How Earthe uppon Earthe may be hey brought."

CHAPTER IV.

"For money b'ing th' common scale
Of things by measure, weight and tale,
In all th' affairs of church and state;
'Tis both the balance and weight."

So large were the securities and mortgages held against the Abbey by Benedict, the chief creditor, that he, with several of his brethren, had bought land from the town folk of St. Edmunds, and erected a stone house where they could be near their debtors. Here they had dwelt for some years, like vultures waiting for a chance to descend upon their prey.

The Jews had suffered long and cruel oppression from the people of England in general, and the church in particular; but at last the time had come in which it seemed possible that Benedict and his friends could become revenged upon their old-time enemies. Becoming aware of the disorganization of the Abbey, they took advantage of the general excitement, on the morning after the Abbot's death, to seize upon certain chests of gold, vessels of silver, as well as jewels and some rare and precious relics, and departing suddenly for London, they declared they would hold them until proper indemnity was paid.

The Prior, in dismay, wrote a lengthy memorial to Prince John, setting forth the state of affairs, begging that they be speedily allowed to elect an Abbot, and that the Jews be compelled to disgorge their plunder.

This missive was signed by the Abbey advocates, lords strong in fortress, famous for prowess in war; and was, as far as the Abbotship went, a declaration that the monks and knights belonging to the Abbey would hold an election.

This parchment was carried to Prince John one morning as he sat breakfasting at his toilet in his chamber in Northampton Castle. He intended going hawking, and the delay caused by the arrival of this unwelcome message so vexed him that his attendants fared badly, and more than one servitor had a rap from his dagger hilt. One unfortunate varlet received the remains of a venison pasty full in the face, with its silver trencher to keep it company, because he tied the points of the Prince's red Norman shoes to his garters, instead of to his knees, as was his wont to wear them.

His toilet completed, the Prince dismissed all of his attendants save one, a heavy jowled handsome young man of twenty-five, rather obese for his age, and dressed in the richly furred robe of a Chancellor. This courtier, noting his Highness' ill humor, remained discreetly silent, taking up a lute from a bench near by and beginning to strum idly upon it (though softly) with his white bejeweled fingers.

John himself had borrowed largely from the Jews of whom the Prior's missive treated, and had shielded the family of Benedict, more than once, against the charges of St. Edmundsbury; as the Abbey and its knights were loyal to the absent King Richard, and the Prince, (who conspired with France against his brother), was not sorry to see the Abbey's pride brought low. Indeed, he had

cause to fear and dislike the church, for the great Abbeys of England, were mighty factors of power, and, joined with the haughty, rebellious nobles, resisted and defied John and the other Regents, the Bishops of Ely and Waltham, whom Richard had left to rule England rather than allow the reins of government to fall into his brother's hands. They, however, looking to John as their future King, (if his conspiracy with Philip of France was successful), allowed him to dictate the policy of the government, and assume the role of England's ruler.

Prince John finally threw aside the Prior's missive with an exclamation of disgust. "By our Lady," he said to his friend and confidant, Chancellor Geoffrey, "If the Lion of England would but come again to his lair long enough to crush these bickerings, and smite these proud Abbots and nobles to the dust, then could I make England such another kingdom as that my cousin France boasts of."

"But, my Prince, were it not best to pray that the Lion would then return to gnaw the Infidel's bones, and leave thee undisturbed to rule in peace?" the other asked softly and maliciously.

John turned his little eyes frowningly on the Favorite. "Thou viper, whom I took unto my breast from the convent dunghill whereon thy mother reared her king's brat, needest remind me that I am not *yet king*? That I must still bend subservient knee to the preading brigand whom foul fortune hath made England's ruler?"

Geoffrey's face reddened at the insult, but he bit his lip, and affected to hum a song to his lute strumming. His mother, Rosamund de Clifford, when driven by the Queen

from the royal manor, where she held sway over the heart of Henry, had retired to a Priory near St. Edmundsbury, and here had reared her son. Becoming in course of time, Prioress, and gaining great fame throughout the country for her virtuous indignation and duress against fragile females. When her son became too old to remain in the convent without scandal, Rosamund sent him to the Abbey schools, and, in lack of any other career, (for no great noble would take him as page), she wished to place him as novice at St. Edmundsbury, but the Abbot, for political reasons, refused to receive so undesirable an inmate, and Lady Rosamund was in despair. It was then a courtier who had loved her when she was mistress of the King, placed him at court as a Herald, under the unpretentious name of "Master Geoffrey," but after a few months, the keen eyes of the Queen spied him out; and, exiled from court, back he must pack to the Priory; for at the age of twenty he knew no more of the profession of arms, save for a little fencing, than a lady's puny page. And thus, with Church and Field closed against him, it would have fared hard with the young bastard, if Prince John (pride and delight of Elinor's heart) had not become attached to him. Finding him with his subservient gayety, ready wit and flattering tongue the ideal courtier, he demanded that his half-brother be provided for, and as is customary with sons of doting mothers, he had his will. Queen Elinor forewent her hatred against the son of a whilom rival, and Geoffrey was appointed Chancellor. Since Richard's departure, he had ever been at John's right hand a tutor

and a sharer in his excesses, a plotter and go-between; the jackal that skulked in the wake of this princely cub.

Like King Henry in feature — Geoffrey was his mother's true son, — well schooled in his years of seclusion; though the insolent irascibility, inherited from his father, sometimes showed, dispite him: — as on this occasion. So while he sang a roundelay of, "Maidens fair with breasts of snow," he cursed himself heartily for his short wit and long tongue. But happily, John was too changeable of mood to be long vexed at the one man who could charm away that *bete noire* of Princes,—*ennui*; and soon turned from the casement where he had stalked in a pet at his brother's inconsiderate reminder, and laying his hand upon his shoulder, said:

"Nay, Geoffrey, I know thou didst not mean it thus. I have a very devil in me, methinks sometimes, that twists everything askew, and this complaint from the Prior of St. Edmunds, with its insolent accompaniment, vexeth me sore."

"Ods Bodkins! Let the Jew, Benedict, raze the whole damned pile to the earth; 'twill but fill his coffers the fuller, and thence we can draw shekels to fill our own depleted purses. Eh, brother?"

Smiling at this sally, John continued, "Abbot Hugo is dead, and we must appoint another Abbot, *though* they *do* so boldly declare the right of election; and as the Abbot, by right of much fief holding, is among the counsellors of the King, beshrew me, Geff, if I wish not now that thou hadst become the sniveling novice thy mother would have

made thee. And by my troth, thou'st be a mitered Abbot on the morrow!"

Laughing loudly at this, the Favorite clapped the Prince on the back, declaring him to be the most "kingly of kings," and they went to mount their gayly caparisoned horses, and ride away to hawk, followed by a brilliant retinue of lords and ladies. The Prince was in high good humor at the turn his thoughts had taken and soon imparted them to the rest of the company, so that Geoffrey continued to be addressed all morning by the title of "Abbot."

CHAPTER V.

"The bells tolled out their solemn peal
For the departed spirit's weal."

On a bier, before St. Edmunds' High altar, lay the body of Hugo. The tapers' yellow light concentrated around the heavy velvet pall which enveloped it, irradiating from the golden fringe, until the Abbot seemed already surrounded by an aureole of glory. The gold and jewels that decked the altar and shrine cast back the reflection until objects near by were wrapped in a brilliant circle of light, surrounded by the darkness of the great church, whose dim vistas stretched on either hand.

Far down the Abbey wall the rising moon peered in through the painted window panes; her light separated as it fell upon the tasselated floor, into great blotches of green and blue, red and gold, by mullions and tracery of most exquisite designs. Above, the tall shafts mounted in massive pride to spread into carved branches upholding the vaulted dome; all showing but dimly, though an hundred tapers would not have dispelled the black shadows massed there by centuries of nights. Thus in state, Hugo had lain seven days and nights, guarded well by his faithful monks. Abbot Hugo now no longer, only a pallid, shriveled old man, who, becoming tired of life's burdens, had doffed the cloak of mortality, and lain down to rest, leaving the gauds of human greatness lying idle and neglected about his couch.

At midnight the Abbey bell began to sound, and the watchers beside the bier disappeared into the semi-darkness of the side aisles. The great door swung open slowly and silently; the organ pealed forth, and up the broad center aisle came the Bishop of Waltham in full sacerdotals; behind him the Prior, carrying a silver clasped Missal, led the long procession of monks who came two by two in sable cowls and scapulars and white stoles. Wending their way to the altar in a blaze of light (for each monk carried a burning taper), and in their midst the bejeweled Host glittered like a miniature sun. When the procession reached the altar, it opened to right and left, and formed two dark wings on either side of the Bishop's purple-robed, lace-draped figure. Then mass was sung with all due pomp and ceremony; prayers were said, and from the fretted choir above them rolled out the solemn notes of the Requiem; while the aromatic smoke of incense enveloped them in a fragrant cloud. When the last notes of the chant had died away, the dead Abbot was laid in a niche cut in the rock of the transept wall, and covered with a slab of polished basalt, whereon was carved his name, age and degree, above the miter and crook that his brethren before him had fought long and bitterly to bear.

Thus they left him, to lie through the years, while other Abbots came and went, and ever changing bands of monks murmured their prayers above his unhearing ears. Slowly, sadly, the procession passed, each monk extinguishing his taper at the tomb; and, as the last footfall died away, the bells tolled out a knell for the departed soul.

Yet, there was one who lingered there; the Norfolk monk,

Samson, (released from his prison tower), paced long beneath the great mullioned window, pondering deeply, murmuring to himself; sometimes stretching his hands towards the altar, as if he called the Saint to witness some vow he made. "The occasion maketh the man," and in a crisis, there is ever some one superior to the rest, who steps forward from the ranks and lays his hand upon the rein, and men recognizing in him a leader, follow him. And Samson, the "man" for this occasion of St. Edmunds' orphaning, swore upon her altar to be a father to the orphaned Abbey: to be its *Abbas Dominus*.

Samson had a few friends and followers in the Abbey, (though they had been obscured by the general cloud of his unpopularity;) and they saw that his was the only hand strong enough to wield the miter, and raise the Abbey to power and opulence. So, the next morning, when the Prior had summoned the brethren to the Chapter room, and had sworn them to deal justly, they duly appointed twelve of the brethren to repair with the Prior to Waltham Manor, where their Abbot would be elected, and Samson was among those chosen.

When the twelve were counted Jocelin, Walter the Medicus, and Samson, with the Prior and Sub Prior, and several of the elder monks made up the number. Now the Prior, believing that the Abbey would never recover from the ruinous state into which its affairs had lapsed, had no wish to be Abbot. Besides, he desired to pass his declining days in Rome, on the residue of the convent treasure left by the Jews, (which he had carefully appropriated and concealed). So, unconcerned, having already applied to the

Pope for office, he presided carelessly, wondering on whose head the miter would fall, and he too thought that Samson was the only one of them fitted to be Abbot.

John O'Dice and Brother Tristian were of the twelve, and they had little preference beyond desiring that the hated Sub Prior was not set at their head. Richard of Hennan inclined toward Samson, for he was the only man of brawn and bulk in the Abbey, and butcher Richard had no standard save "muscle."

"Will the Prince permit us to choose whom we will?" asked John O'Dice.

"It is our right and if he does not," snapped Walter, "we can protest and appeal to the Holy Father."

"Ah, I hope we may do this in peace!" murmured Brother Tristian.

"Nay, nay," bawled Richard, "we'll get to arms 'neath our Advocates' banners, and elect whomsoe'er we please by force of arms." Thus many were the questionings and disputes, until Jocelin, the youngest of the body, (who had hitherto kept modestly silent) spoke:

"What if we agree not among ourselves?" The electors stared at each other in consternation; they had not thought of that. They looked toward the Prior, but he was deep in reckoning the number of golden cups one could pack into a certain oaken chest, and heeded them not. The Sub Prior was, as usual, half alseep. Jocelin, tutored by Samson, did not try to answer his own question. Then the big Norfolk monk said quietly:

"It seems best to me that we select six, who shall then agree on three names secretly; these they shall write and

seal, and not open until in Council with the Bishop of Waltham, then they shall be submitted and our Abbot chosen from them." Relieved to have their thinking done for them, the simple monks unanimously agreed, and left the Chapter house, after having named the Prior, Sub Prior, Jocelin, Samson, Walter and old John; who easily agreeing on three names, sealed the parchment, and the electors set out presently on jennets, and after half a day's ride, knocked at the gate of my Lord Bishop.

The courtyard was crowded with soldiers, church servitors and varlets, with an occasional courtier passing to and fro, and the cavalcade was the subject of many a rude jest.

"Here cometh fat black ducks for Prince John's picking," called one soldier to a fellow, who, stripped to the waist, was burnishing his hauberk. The polisher had his mouth filled with water, (which from time to time he squirted upon the hauberk to accelerate the cleansing process), so he made no answer to this pleasantry, save by an inarticulate grunt. But the portly Seneschal, who came forward to greet the monks, cursed the jester heartily.

"God's malmaison on thee, thou pork! From these holy men the Abbot of Bury is to be chosen. In my youthful days such as thou wore a collar of brass about his neck, and was whipped with the dog lash if he but spake too loud; but now every popinjay page, and preading foot bawleth abroad his fooleries, with none to say him nay." This rebuke somewhat silenced their ribaldry, though there was still much laughter over the poor equipment of the monks, and the effeminate way in which they drew their robes through the crook of the elbow.

The Seneschal led them into a large hall, where a fire had been kindled to ward off the evening chill. Here, on a dais, was Prince John; behind him stood Geoffrey, and at his right hand sat the Bishop of Waltham. All the monks bowed low save Samson, who scarcely bent his untonsured head: then the Prior went forward, and when he had kissed the Prince's hand, he and the Bishop conversed apart for some time.

During Richard's reign there was no law which necessitated an Abbot being a Churchman, and as soon as Prince John discovered this he decided to give the Abbey to Geoffrey. This determination was a blow to the Prior as it menaced his plans; for should the Prince appoint the ruler of the Abbey, custodians would be sent thither, and he would have to give a strict account of all treasure listed upon the Abbey books. After some discussion, the Bishop spoke to Prince John, stating that the Prior protested against an *appointed* Abbot, and demanded the right of electing one of their own number. John at once broke forth in a rage. "God's blood! thou pope — holy monk; dos't beard me? Geoffrey, and none other, shall have St. Edmunds; and a merry life he'll lead his sons. Geoffrey, *Abbas Dominus*?" and the idea of the dissipated courtier as a father Abbot so amused the volatile Prince that he laughed. Then the Prior ventured to beg that he speak with him. The Prince motioned Geoffrey and the Bishop to leave the dais, and conversed for some time with the him, his face first darkening at the Prior's words, and then approving, he nodded his head, and at last, smiting his knee, exclaimed, "By my halidame, 'tis the thing! A

fair damsel, a great fief, and a chance to spite my brother Richard — I mean *to reward my brother Geoffrey.*"

In short, this was what the subtle Prior whispered. Adam de Cokefeld, Chief Advocate of the Abbey had been slain in the crusade against Palestine. He left his daughter Rohese and a rich fief to the guardianship of the Abbot of Bury. Now De Cokefeld's brother Advocates would refuse to accept as guardian of these riches any Abbot of the hated Regent's appointing; and by electing one of their own number Abbot, the monks would furnish a guardian satisfactory to them, and, at some future time, the Abbot could privately transfer the ward and her fortune to whomsoever the Prince should designate.

"Is this Lady Rohese fair, Prior?"

"Truly, so they say," answered the Prior so primly that the Prince laughed again, and was in high good humor with himself and all the world. He motioned his Favorite to him.

"Here, Geff," he said, "the worthy Prior offers in exchange for a worm-eaten convent, rat-ridden and wrapped in debt, with droning, sniveling monks, the fairest fief in the realm, and a maid, Rohese by name — a name that brings to mind a red, red rose. Thou shalt pluck this red rose, Geff, and pull the tassel of its golden purse. Wilt give up being Abbot for warmer temporal blessings?"

"Ay, that I will; a fair maid, a fair fief, and leave to serve my Prince; what more could a poor courtier ask? Thou art great and generous, my brother," and Geoffrey knelt to kiss John's hand.

"Away, then, to the Council, Sir Prior; marshal thy

black flock before thee; and thou, my Lord Bishop, attend us to the banquet hall, for, beshrew me, if my stomach lieth not it is time to sup."

The Prior and monks followed the Seneschal to a nearby chamber; that worthy waving his baton with ponderous condescension, as if it were some fairy wand with which he could bestow the Abbey and lands as he would.

When they were seated at the great carved oak table, and the tapers had been lit in the sconces, no one spoke until Samson said, in a voice of command, "Produce the names." Already the man of power stepped forward to assume the leadership. Jocelin opened his scrip and gave the parchment to the Prior. With elaborate care he unsealed it, and read in his high, sing-song voice:

"Roger, Prior,
Gilbert, Sub Prior,
Samson, Sacristan."

There was no comment upon the names, save John O'Dice's contemptuous grunt as the name of Gilbert was read. In silence the monks bowed their heads, as the Prior repeated the oath binding them to vote fairly. Then, one by one, they wrote a name on a slip of parchment, (saving Richard, the butcher, and John who unequal to that task delegated it to the Prior). Prior Roger then read aloud the names. *He* had received the greater number of votes; a few for Samson, and one for Gilbert, (presumably cast by that worthy himself), completed the toll. The face of Samson was unperturbed, but Jocelin, paled with disappointment.

"My brethren," the thin voice of Roger broke the silence,

"I grow old and weary of service, and I tell ye now that I shall soon bid farewell to our Alma Mater and away to the Holy City to pass my days in prayer and fasting."

"Wantoning and feasting," murmured the Medicus spitefully, having in mind a slip of Roger's long before he had gained the Priorship; to which Walter aspired.

"So, *mez fils*, I give you thanks, and tell you that I cannot be recorded St. Edmund's Abbot."

After some show of astonishment at this news, they fell into a lengthy discussion of it. A set of childish, simple men were these, unlearned in the ways of the world, but half men at best, as men went in those times; they babbled on to no purpose, finally hailing Samson's suggestion that they ballot again on the two remaining names. This they did; and, save Gilbert's vote for himself, the parchments bore the name of "Samson, Sacristan." The Prior nodded his head, and Jocelin's soft eyes beamed a keen delight. Samson rose and made obeisance to his brethren. "I thank ye," he said, his rugged features unchanged; and two by two the monks filed into the banquet hall, where the Prior made known the Council's choice. The Prince did not lay down the lark's leg he was gnawing, nor did he pause to wipe his greasy mouth upon his gold fringed napkin, — "I do as ye desire. Confirming the Council, I salute thee, Samson, Dominus-Abbas of Bury. Our Lord Bishop I appoint to install thee at thine own appointed time. Prior, remember De Cokefeld's fief, and thou, Abbot Samson, see that thou govern well and snatch thine Abbey from the Jews' clutches," spitting as he spoke to express his Christian abhorrence of the race, "for if thou

fail I will be upon thee like the wolf upon the fold." Samson kissed the royal hand still holding the lark's leg; then he blessed the audience; and heading his monks with a stern glance at the Prince which somewhat disconcerted him, he marched from the hall to the chorus of the fifty-first psalm, "*Miserere mei Deus*," leaving the chagrined Prince to exclaim "By the true eyes of God! Methinks that *one* will govern the Abbey well."

CHAPTER VI.

"Spite of briar and thistle,
The old tower
Remains triumphant,
Through the darkest hour.
Superb as pontiff
In the forest shown,
Its rows of battlements
Make triple crown."

THE keep of Sir Adam de Cokefeld stood on a wooded plateau with the river Lark nearly surrounding it, a natural moat for the Castle. Its portcullised drawbridge led to a paved courtyard, usually thronged by bearded foot soldiers in gleaming, clanking mail, or long leathern jackets and buskins, playing at quoits among stacked lances and the chargers, which grooms were feeding and rubbing down.

In the castle hall yawned a fireplace great enough to roast an ox whole, and its walls were hung with iron-spiked clubs, heavy maces and sheaves of quarrels, with their cross-bows. This hall was the entrance to the donjon, or keep, where were stored the arms and provisions, used during sieges; and from the keep an iron barred doorway led into the living apartments, which opened upon a turfed balium, one side of which was faced by the chapel and soldiers' quarters, backed by walls of great height and thickness.

At Sir Adam's death, the household of Lady Rohese

vainly urged her to seek asylum in the Nunnery near St. Edmunds. But her first grief past, she set the keep in order and spent the year of mourning in receiving her father's soldiers, who came straggling back, a few at a time, from the unsuccessful siege of Jerusalem. With the protested aid of her Seneschal, Gilbert O'Dice, she collected her rents and governed her people well. Though her chief vassals and tenants were much scandalized, when on the day of judgment they assembled in the castle hall, and found the slim figure of their lady in the great judgment chair, with her maids behind her and old Gilbert at her side, wringing his hands that a woman should dare to sit in the seat, whence the long line of De Cokefelds had governed so well. But the maiden judge went calmly about her business, and settled a dispute between two grange-holders in a way that none could demur.

Thereafter she had gone on somewhat laughed at by her father's brother knights, and a great scandal and horror in the eyes of their ladies. "She can *read*" Bishop Riddel's sister Alicia exclaimed to her friend and gossip, the Lady of Clare. "An' Latin, too, like a monk, by my troth!" answered the other.

"The maid will come to no good end. God ne'er intended woman to aspire to the intellects of man." And they nodded their heads sagely over their posset cups for they often spent the night together when the good Bishop was away on some expedition with my Lord of Clare.

But, the maiden holder of the keep went on her way oblivious of praise or blame, a just ruler of her people; loved by all and worshipped by her soldiers; though her

maids often whispered to each other that their lady had never smiled since the news of Sir Adam's death.

"But 'tis not all from mourning our Lord," said Mary, eldest and favorite of the attendants, as they sat in the lady's bower one rainy autumn morning, "I have lived with Lady Rohese since we two were babes together, for is she not my foster sister? And well I know what page it was who played oftenest in our Bower. Henry Leicester, Sir Adam's ward, would leave many a hawk unflown to play the lute as we sat at our needles; and grown older — a gallant squire, he still wore her glove in his cap. An' by our Lady! maids, did I not go with Sir Adam and Lady Rohese to St. Edmunds, where two years ago she fixed the spurs upon young Henry, and gave him his knight's helmet, with her colors in the crest? Then Sir Adam laughed, as the two looked long upon each other; an' blushing, looked again, as if they could not cease, and said to my Lord Abbot, — 'Dominie, there will be nuptials in St. Edmunds when this popinjay comes back from the wars and takes up his inheritance.' An' then, maids, ye should have seen Henry's face, and how he kissed our Lady's hand, an' how she pulled me away; until we ran into the Sacristy, that the knights and monks should not see how her bosom heaved, an' her eyes filled. Then she fell on my neck and murmured, 'O girl, I love him; I love him!'"

"And to this day has she never spoken of him?" asked Eunice, youngest of the maids, her round blue eyes moist with sympathy.

"Never, poppet. When news came of Sir Adam's death

she turned white and sat for a moment very still. Then she asked, 'And what news of Henry of Leicester?'

"'"'Tis thought that he died defending his lord,' was the answer.

"An' 'twas then our Lady cried 'Ah!' as if an arrow had struck home, and pressing her hand to her heart fell back in my arms in a swoon — the first of her life."

"'"Tis like some tale of Arthur's court," sighed Anne, who was very sentimental, and fancied herself pining with love for a certain burly horseman, who knew not whether her hair was white or brown, and would give any maid in Christendom for one pot of nut-brown ale.

While thus the maidens gossipped softly over their embroidery frame, the Mistress sat sadly looking out on the dreary rain-soaked balium. Her purple robe, with its loose wide sleeves, was unadorned, though her white veil fell from a purple velvet headdress, richly bejeweled with rubies and diamonds. As she sat musing with her cheek on her white hand, the maids, their bit of gossip done, had a laughing jibe or two at the expense of a fa r-haired youth, clad richly in minstrel's garb, who sat idly strumming his harp in vexation, that his Lady did not bid him begin his new ballad.

But Lady Rohese was in no mood for minstrelsy. For a long, weary year she had eased her aching heart by attending upon the hard duties of her position but now that she had learned thoroughly the routine, had systemized all the household workings, (to the dismay of the servants), and had mastered the details and management of her fief, from the collecting of scutage-monies, (paid yearly

to the King's exchequer), to the small dribblings of the rep taxes into her own; she found time heavy on her hands, and many a dreary hour in which to brood over the lost father and lover. She was no lily maid — this Lady Rohese — left early without a mother, alone with the servitors in her father's keep, his companion at hunt and board; tutored by the master of Ely's schools, who twice a week rode between the castle and the town, to teach the little maid who reigned, supreme in Sir Adam's hall and heart.

So she had grown learned for a woman of her time and age. Straight, tall, and lithe as a willow wand; her small, auburned crowned head set well upon her tower-like neck;—she was formed in classic mould; taper of limb and straight of feature, with almond shaped eyes of deepest grey, and a generous scarlet mouth opening on teeth as white as the carved ivory necklace her father had brought her from eastern countries. Her skin was of that clear, creamy tint, (just tinged on the rounded cheeks with pink), rarely beheld, save in some perfect flower.

Rohese recalled herself with a start, and looking toward the minstrel, said kindly, "Now, Raoul, let us hear thy ballad. May, move my chair to the frame, and I will bestir my sluggard self," and taking up her position in the midst of her maids, she began to ply a skilful needle, as Raoul, his petulance banished by her smile, struck the chords of his harp, and sang to a plaintive air:

"There dwelt a Page in Castle Clare,
And O he loved his Lady so,
And yet she moved so proud and fair —

She did not care — she did not know,
She did not care, nor know.

It was one morning bright and fair,
The Lady hawking rode that day,
And by a dark and deep mill stream
Her retin'e took their way — their way
Her retin'e took their way.

All gaily decked in cloth of gold
The Lady rode and cried
'Unhood the hawk at yon mill race!'
To the leal page at her side — her side
To the leal page at her side.

But when her favorite hawk sunk down
All wounded in the Race —
'Alas' — she cried — 'my goshawk save' —
Whilst tears ran down her face — her face —
Whilst tears ran down her face.

Then into the deep water sprang
Sir page, her hawk to save,
But never rose he from the stream —
The mill race was his grave — his grave
The mill race was his grave.

The Lady she shed many a tear —
'That page I'll ne'er forget,

But tell me, Steward, did he save
For me my precious pet — my pet
For me my precious pet?'

There dwelt a Page in Castle Clare,
And O he loved his Lady so,
And yet she moved so proud and fair —
She did not care, she did not know —
She did not care, nor know."

When the last note rippled away, Raoul sat expectant of a word of praise from Lady Rohese, (whilst the maids exclaimed at the pitiful fate of the page, and the indifference of the lady); but the minstrel was doomed to disappointment, for as Rohese lifted her head from the 'broidery frame to thank him for his song, the door opened and Gilbert O'Dice entered, his meagre little frame drawn to its full height, and his weazened face portentious. He was followed by a young monk, and announced in a loud voice, as he bowed before his lady, "A messenger from our Lord, the Abbot."

CHAPTER VII.

"A sworn celebate,
Whose heart in secret fed upon the light and dew of
her ripe beauty;
Cursing, all too late,
The cruel fate, whose black walls hemmed him in,
And turned life's crowning bliss to deadly sin."

THE minstrel withdrew as the monk advanced, and the maids turned again to their 'broidery. Buxom, brown-haired Mary; slender, sharp-featured Bertha, with flaxen ringlets and paper-white skin; Anne, swart and tall, (a Spanish father's blood showing in dusky face and eyes), and little childish Eunice, gentian blue of eye, with one long plait of the palest brown hair falling to her knees. Dressed in dark, close girdled robes, grouped about their lady like so many pretty garden flowers around a regal rose, they formed a blooming background to Rohese, as she straightened herself to receive the Abbot's messenger. The messenger, Jocelin of Brakelond, paused before them, dumfounded, with a missive half extended, gazing at them with child-like wonder and delight. Save for the wenches of Bury town, he had seen no other woman, and his mother, long since dead, was the only lady he had ever known. Rohese, though impressed with his appearance, was too accustomed to the young and handsome nobles who visited her father's castle, to be moved by even such beauty as

the young monk possessed, and she could but smile at his evident confusion.

As he looked at her, as if for encouragement, their eyes met, the sparkling grey of the maid, and the somber brown of the monk; for a second the grey eyes twinkled with amusement, but their long lashes flickered and fell, and a blush crept over the maid's face, for the monk's gaze seemed bent on piercing to her very soul; then his look took fire; in a flash it changed to one devouring, appealing wooing; latent passion, smouldering unexercised, had flashed into flame. Nature had completed her work. This cloister-bred youth had found his manly heritage. The recognition of sex had come to him, and the man, a sworn celibate, loved.

Of course, there was no analysis of this in Rohese's mind; yet she felt an intuitive alarm and resentment at the monk's long gaze, and modesty, (ever like those timid little lizards that tremble at the shadow of a leaf), unfurled her banners on the girl's brow and cheek. But quick as it came the blush faded, and she spoke with courteous dignity:

"What is the will of our Lord, Sir Monk?"

Jocelin started at the sound of her voice, like one awakened from a pleasant dream.

"Lady, I bring thee a message from our father, Abbot Samson."

"Samson, say'st thou? I have but returned from a stay in Norfolk, and knew not of a new Abbot."

"Hugo is long since dead, Madam, and our Abbas Dominus, Samson, has for many felicitous months ruled

over our Abbey wisely and well, adding to our number one hundred and fifty brethren from Normandy."

"Thou art welcome, sir — what call they thee?"

"Jocelin de Brakelonda, Lady, and the Abbot commands that I bring back thy answer ere tomorrow's sunrise."

"Truly, ere sunrise, Brother Jocelin? 'Tis far to go alone and a darksome way by evening. Yea, I now bethink me. Each forest hath its John Scarlet and Robin Hood these days, and by my Christendom, an unarmed monk would little avail against such sturdy robbers."

"Alas, Madam, methinks they would not care for the rough serge of a monk's robe, and I have naught else, for poverty is the vow of the Benedictine; yet though I wear no mail, and carry no sword, I fear not. God protects His own — they need no steel."

This doctrine was new to Rohese; reared among men whose sole aim in life was war; who learned early the motto, "Mine honor and mine good sword;" and she rather caviled at such sentiments, though she could but admire the uplifted look with which Jocelin voiced his faith.

"Yet, sunset, or sunrise, Brother Jocelin," she said, "thou must have food and rest; so let us offer thee fair water for thy toilet, and a cup of wine and pasty for thy stomach's sake; whilst I read the will of the Abbot, and write me an answer to it. Nay, look not so wonderful that I should say 'write,' for I am not the only woman in the realm who can both read and write, and perhaps construe their bit of Latin, too."

"By my troth," she murmured to her maids, as Jocelin

followed Gilbert O'Dice from the bower, "but these Abbey lubbers are but green goslings — but half men; and yet I would not dub *ye* dolts by saying he was half *made*."

"Set away the 'broidery frame, girls, and leave me; save thou, Mary; bring parchment and inkhorn." Rohese arose, and moving to a desk near the row of windows which lighted the bower, sat there turning over in her hand the letter sealed with the oval seal, bearing the imprint of a steed, (the Abbot's insignia), and tied with a purple cord; her thoughts strayed to the monk and his strange behavior, and she murmured, "Now Pardie! I wonder what his meaning is?"

"Perhaps, if thou wouldst open it, Madam, thou wouldst know," Mary said smartly, as she placed the ink and parchment on the desk.

"Tut, thou art pert; get thee gone to thy mates, and see that thy tongue prove not the unruly member." The girl gone, Rohese broke the seal and read, in the Abbot's crabbed script:

"Greeting to Rohese, Lady de Cokefeld: As thou art the daughter of my chief Milite, and of my cousin, the Lady of Framlingham, it behooves me, now that thou art at marriageable age, to give thee in marriage as befitteth thy rank and station. Because thou art ward of our Abbey, I would that ye come to me that I might know thy will concerning thy wedding. Jocelin of Brakelond, who bears this missive, will convey thy answer. So I bid thee set a time to visit me at Bradfield house. Our Lady's benison on thee.

Given under my hand and seal at the Abbey of St. Edmundsbury.

SAMSONIS–ABBATIS."

Rohese's face was scarlet ere she had finished, and when done, she flung the letter from her, and stamping her foot in rage, cried, "Zounds! And I am to be parceled off to some lout, who shall govern my people and rule my castle? Shall any pope-holy Abbot put man into the bed, or at the board where Henry of Leicester should have been? O my love! And had not some cursed Infidel's spear laid thy proud crest low, I should have been a happy wife, the proudest lady in the realm; whereas, now I am the dolourest maid in all Christendom. Parentless and husbandless," and laying her head on her arms, she sobbed bitterly.

Then she dashed the tears from her face; "Yet, let me think. How says the Abbot?" taking up the discarded letter, " 'Thy mother's cousin". Aye, I have oft heard old nurse tell of the rude Norfork baron, who for love of my mother, his cousin, sought the cloister. Surely then, if this be he, he will not force a hateful marriage on me when he knows how my poor heart is widowed. I'll to him, and tell him all my mind. Yet, Abbot though he be, let him beware if he cross me; the de Cokefeld will bends not." Rohese blew a silver whistle, suspended from her neck, and a page appeared. "Mordred, send Mary hither, and tell the monk when he has finished his repast I'll speak with him i' the balium. 'Tis after the mid hour and the rain is past, is it not so?"

"Aye, my Lady."

Mary returned, rather sulky after her mistress'

reproof, but her face soon lost its pout in her delight at the news.

"Mary, we go to the Abbey on the morrow; our Lord, the Abbot, hath invited me to visit him at Bradfield house. See to it that our apparel is ready, and that Gilbert prepare fit escort."

"Wilt thou take sad colored robes, Madam?"

"Nay, wench, the gay 'broidered ones, as thou lovest me; the Abbot is a man, girl, an' I've a favor to ask of him."

Mary smiled appreciatively, and hurried away upon her errands. Rohese drew her cloak about her, and passed through the arched doorway which led from the bower into the balium. The rain was over, the air was damply sweet, and the noon sun shone warm and bright on the steaming walk. By the keep wall some asters were flaunting their purple sprays in the sunshine, all rain-bejeweled. Jocelin, advancing up the walk, thought she was as beautiful as an angel, as she stood outlined by the grey stones the jewels of her head-dress not more sparkling than her eyes; her robe, as she stooped to pluck a flower, moulded to her exquisite figure. She raised herself as he came near.

"Ah, Brother Jocelin, is this not a day to warm thy monkly blood? See, Dame Nature hath finished her family wash, and hung it out to dry in the sunshine."

"In truth, Lady, it sendeth forth a fragrant steam. But pardie! why mock at me for being a monk? I am a man, no less." A resentful note quivered in his voice, and Rohese saw that her careless jibe had pricked him.

"Nay," she said kindly, "I meant no harm; many a

lord of the Church hath led his men to victory. 'Tis said that thy Abbot, Samson, fought with my father on the field against the Flemmings."

"Aye, Madam, so he did. But brute force and fighting valor are not all that is desirable in a man. Wisdom, learning, gentleness, to my mind, are more to be desired than fame in joust or tourney. It will not be many years, Lady Rohese, till every man of quality shall be learned in our lore, and no one shall be called 'gentleman' who hath not this knowledge."

"Poor monk," she thought. "He prates of what he knows not," and resenting Jocelin's superior air, she said rather haughtily, "We have been trained in different schools, sir. '*Dieu et mon droit*' is, to my mind, the only fit motto for a gentleman; yet, 'God and my book,' *may* serve thy turn as well. But a truce to these cross-questionings; my Lord, the Abbot, commands my presence at Bradfield house, and I go tomorrow."

"I will bear thy message, Madam." Jocelin said, bowing coldly, for she had vexed and wounded him by her open contempt.

"Yet stay, Brother Jocelin!" she called as he moved slowly toward the donjon entrance, reproaching herself for her lack of courtesy, and wishing to make amends. He turned, and she came up to him somewhat hurriedly, her cheeks flushed by her generous impulse.

"Forgive me if I were rude, and go not from de Cokefeld tonight. The way is long, and darkness will o'ertake thee. I fear for thy safety in the forest. Delay till the morrow, and ride with me to the Abbey." And she put

out her hand and touched him on the arm. Jocelin was young, in love, the hand of the woman he loved lay — lily white on his sleeve, sending a thrill through his veins. He looked deep into her eyes, with a smile like a caress on his delicate red lips; then he broke the first rule of his order — "Obedience."

"Lady, I will not go today. Do as thou wilt with me," and he hurried from the balium.

"Grammacy," murmured Rohese, gazing after him half smiling, " 'tis the strangest monk I ever saw; yet methinks he *is* a man after all."

CHAPTER VIII.

"Cast thou thy rosary far from thee,
And gaze on yonder curl and mole."

THE morning dawned bright and clear, and Jocelin awoke upon a soft couch, as different from his own straw pallaisse as his thoughts and feelings of today differed from those of yesterday. Through his chamber window there came a great hallobaloo from the courtyard; a neighing of horses, barking of hounds, and the Seneschal's shrill voice calling out orders. Within the castle, all was bustle and preparation. Tittering maids paused in their skurry by his doorway to greet some saucy page on his way to unleash the dogs.

Jocelin lay for a moment on his luxurious couch, contrasting the elegant arras-hung chamber with his bare cell in the Abbey.

"There is like comparison to be made of the life of monk and knight," he muttered bitterly, as he donned his robe and sandals; "one all bareness, coldness and desuetude, the other all light, life and action, crowned by fame and love. Love! Beshrew me! What hath a monk to do with love? He has taken the Church to spouse, and 'tis a deadly sin for him to adulterate his conjugal thoughts. Yesterday methought I knew what love meant — a calm, sweet regard, strong in affection and admiration; such an emotion as one feels for parents, or the Abbot. But now, wretched wight that I am, love hath slit me unawares; too

late hath he opened my blinded eyes, and vouchsafed to me a dazzling vision of his joys. Tantalus' feast spread to mock my unable heart. Love, life's fire, with hope, fear, joy, sorrow, pleasure and pain, its components, hath wrapped me in longing and desire, and I — I am so weak that for a woman's smile I cast aside my good respect; break my vows, and turn to a chitty-faced coward who trembles and dares not look his Lord in the face for fear his traitorousness will beam from his sneaking eyes, and announce, 'Here is a monk foresworn — a renegade.' How say the Scriptures? 'Whosoever hath looked upon a woman—' Aye, I am foresworn. This woman hath bewitched me. It is sorcery.

'O caru me Jesu
Nunc libera me!'"

And Jocelin fell upon his knees to tell his rosary. But as the beads slipped through his fingers he seemed again to feel the slight, warm pressure of Rohese' hand; and with every "*Ave*" came the tones of her voice, or the tinkling of her coldly sweet laughter. The monk was betrayed by the natural man within him; and as he arose from his fruitless endeavor to pray, and passed from his chamber, he realized with shame and delight that his heart beat faster, his pulse throbbed quicker, his eyes shone brighter, and his whole being seemed reanimated, enlarged, made stronger, more ready to do and dare, by this mysterious baptism of "Heavenly fire which men have called love."

When Jocelin had broken his fast in the great hall, he went out into the courtyard, where the retinue was already assembling, impatient to be gone; the dogs straining at

their leashes, baying their delight at the prospect of a long scamper over hills and downs. Raoul, his gorgeous dress half covered by a cloak of green and gold brocade, a feathered cap on his head, was on his horse, with a hawk upon his wrist; and Mordred, the page, behind him on a pillion, holding his harp carefully wrapped in a samite covering. Gilbert O'Dice was mounting a gentle old mule, grunting and groaning as he drew his furred cloak about his old limbs.

"Good morrow, Brother Jocelin," he said; "Zounds, but the air nips keenly; it benumbs the limbs."

"Nay, old shrew, not if there be blood in them," interposed Nicholas, the Master of horse, from among his twenty odd horsemen who sat mounted with lances at rest, while behind them were half a score of foot soldiers armed, some with bows, and some with guisarmes; all grinned at this sally, for Gilbert O'Dice was no favorite in the household.

"Yea," said Raoul, in his clear, boyish treble, "we all well know that Master Gilbert hath sawdust for blood, and dull Sheffield whittles in place of bones." This had reference to the fact that Gilbert presided at the retainers' table, cutting the meat. The Seneschal moved uneasily in his saddle, and looked wrathfully from one tormentor to the other; but reinforcement now appeared in the person of Mistress Mary, who came forth from the keep, bustling and rosy, in blue kirtle and hood, bewitching the hearts of all beholders.

"At least, varlet," she said sharply to Raoul, as she superintended the strapping of a huge bundle upon a

sumpter mule, "at least, Master Gilbert hath not two left legs and Judas-colored hair, as have some jack puddings we ken of."

This thrust went straight home, for Raoul was slightly lame and possessed that red hair accredited to the betrayer of our Lord. So the discomforted young minstrel sat biting his lip, with tears of rage and mortification in his eyes while loud guffaws resounded through the courtyard at this sally, and Mistress Mary, well pleased with her retort, went forward with smiling face to greet her mistress, who just then emerged from the doorway of the castle, wrapped in a pelisse of grey rabbit skin over a red gown of richly brocaded satin. Rohese went up to her palfrey, which, hung with cloth of gold, stood near by neighing with joy at sight of his lady. She laid her jeweled 'broidered glove lovingly upon his mane, and declining the proffered aid of Master Nicholas, turned a dazzling glance on Jocelin, who stood staring, awkward, not knowing what was expected of him.

"Mary's eyes!" exclaimed the impatient beauty, frowning haughtily, "Art flesh and blood that thou standst there dumb and still as a stone? I tell thee, Sir Monk, belted earls hath sued for such a privilege."

"Gosling," whispered Mary, giving him a dig in the side with her rounded little elbow, "lift her to the saddle." Jocelin, with blazing face, lifted the soft fragrant burden in his arms with a contrite murmur, "I did not know, Madam," and as for one blissful moment its sensuous sweetness brushed his breast, he felt that heaven could give no greater joy. Rohese, seated in the saddle, relented

when she saw his face, and dimpling with smiles, extended her hand graciously.

"Well-a-day, of course thou didst not know, thou cell-bred fellow. I forgot me thou hast never been to court, nor learned aught of chivalry. Mount, Brother Jocelin, and ride beside me." Jocelin, with a pang of humiliation at the lowliness of his steed, mounted his mouse colored jennet; and Mary being swung up with right good will, behind Master Nicholas, with a very small protesting squeak against the undue pressure that burly squire brought to bear upon her rounded waist; the train moved through the portcullis and down the path leading to the ancient Roman roadway, which wound through Suffolk, close by de Cokefeld castle, and led almost direct to St. Edmundsbury. At its head rode Rohese and Jocelin, followed by Gilbert, Nicholas and Raoul. On either side the horsemen trotted, the foot soldiers bringing up the rear, with several pages, who often broke away from the cavalcade into the copse to join their hounds' exciting chase after some skurrying hare, and Raoul too, sometimes lagged behind to fly his hawk when prey was sighted.

The autumn sunlight fell athwart the roadway as they passed, glowing upon the motley hues of their dress, and gleaming upon gold, silver and steel, until silhouetted against the dark woodland, the gay company moved like some bright pageant illumined by a master hand upon a russet background. As they rode, Jocelin had much to do to keep his jennet by Rohese's side, but she kindly restrained her palfrey; and falling behind the others, they moved slowly, deeply engaged in conversation.

Whilst ever and anon Mistress Mary, from her pillion behind Nicholas, looked backward with many an arch smile and nod at her lady, as if to say, "On to it, Madam; make him curse the day he took monkly vows." But to do Rohese justice, she thought not of conquest, and whatever coquetry she displayed toward Jocelin was but that inherent preening and perking all creatures of her sex naturally fall into, in the presence of the male of their species; and if her voice took on a softer tone, and her blushes came and went under the ardent glances of her companion, she was conscious of no desire to attract or enthrall one whom she could consider neither eligible nor desirable either as suitor or admirer; indeed, she felt for the young monk a kindly condescension one feels towards a child, mingled with a touch of reverence, in which his calling was held by women of the times.

Thus their intercourse was dangerously sweet, for Rohese, throwing aside the hauteur of a dowered lady, and the jibes of a maid familiar with the extravagances of chivalry, fell into a simple, joyous mood, as seductive as it was insignificant. And poor Jocelin, whilst marveling at her wit and evident knowledge of things he knew not the existence of, could but thrill at her warm tones and friendly glances, and fall more in love than ever.

St. Edmunds was but a day's journey from de Cokefeld castle, and the cavalcade, after a short noon rest, pressed briskly onward, until at sunset they wound down the chain of chalk hills which surround St. Edmunds; past several granges, skirting the village wall; and the forest behind the

Abbey. As they passed beneath the prison tower, Rohese asked:

"What is yon grim turret?"

"The Abbey prison, Madam," Jocelin answered, and as the two rode by, its shadow lay across them in the fast gathering twilight. Rohese shivered.

"Doth its shadow not strike a chill to thy marrow?" she cried, urging her horse forward as she spoke.

"Yea, Madam, it would, were thou not beside me. Cold and darkness cannot abide where thou art." Rohese did not answer him save by a look half chiding, half approving.

CHAPTER IX.

"What can you not do
Against lords, spiritual or temporal,
That shall oppone you?"

THE afterglow shone golden through the laced branches of the forest, and within the Abbey walls a bell rang, mellowed by the distance. The monk and maid rode on in silence. Behind them, the cavalcade indulged in interchange of speech and song, but Mistress Mary leant on Nicholas' broad shoulder fast asleep, and he, for fear of losing so pretty a burden, spoke not to his companion, the Seneschal; who jogged on, numbed, cold, and drowsy with his long ride in the keen air.

The glow of the sunset faded; shadows gathered about their pathway, faint stars shone in the greyblue of the sky; and a hush seemed resting over all the world, as if each creature had sought its nest, its den, or home; and lay there close curled, or sat there by the cheery hearth fire, basking in domestic love and its homely joys. This thought was in Jocelin's mind as they rode so close in the narrow dusky lane, as he watched the graceful swaying figure beside him. His heart yearned for the cheer and warmth of a home; the soothing touch of a woman's hand, and that pride and joy of possession which fills and thrills a father's heart as he watches his wife with a child upon her bosom. So intense was his gaze that Rohese felt and resented it, and turned upon him with a half frown knitting her white brow 'neath its dusky

hood. Jocelin, moved by that frown, broke forth with suppressed passion,

"Nay, Madam, frown not on a poor shaveling, who but seeketh to imprint thine image on his starved, and empty heart!" Startled at his vehemence, Rohese shrank from him, and turned her horse toward her companions. But Jocelin had no opportunity to say more, for around the angle of the Abbey wall came the gleam of torches, and the rattle of accoutrements, and Abbot Samson, silver cross in hand, accompanied by attendants, came toward them. He rode a large black mule, with gilded bridle, and saddle and housings rich in jewels, which sparkled in the light of the cressets. The Abbot sat his steed well; a portly martial man, with ruddy face, piercing, bushy-browed eyes, and eagle beaked nose, with grizzly russet beard falling upon his purple gown, over which he wore a rich fur cloak clasped with one blazing male ruby set in gold.

Jocelin drew rein like one stunned at this unlooked-for appearance, and Rohese and her train did likewise. The Abbot's face was stern, and his eyes gleamed angrily beneath their pent brows. But Rohese, undismayed, bent low in her saddle at his "Benedicite," and in smiling sauciness cried out, "Goden, our Liege; and Holy Father, what came ye forth to seek?" The Abbot started at the sound of her clear young voice, and glancing at her lovely, merry face, his brow cleared, and he answered in a tone he meant to be kindly:

"Madam, I find a fair vassal where I sought a disobedient monk!" Here he darted a lightning glance at

Jocelin, who shrank under its rebuke, and drew back into the shadow of the trees, murmuring, "A renegade! a renegade!"

"Had thy vassal e'er seen thy kind face, my Liege, she would not have tarried over night to prepare such poor woman's gauds with which she sought to win favor in the sight of her dread Lord," answered Rohese softly, moving her horse to the Abbot's side, and meekly bowing before him that he might touch her head in blessing.

"It was not needful, my daughter," smiled the Abbot, "the swan needeth to borrow no feathers," and he took her rounded chin in his hand, and looked straight into her clear eyes.

"Thou art somewhat like thy father, child, but thou hast thy mother's own look in thine eyes," and he kissed her gravely on the brow, with a muttered blessing and a half suppressed sigh; and Rohese looked trustingly into his strong face, and felt that here she had found a shield and a buckler for her orphaned heart, with intuitive wisdom realizing the advantage she had gained over any possible suitor, in rallying so strong an ally; and she murmured to Mary, who had now drawn near, with Master Nicholas and Gilbert, "Puppet, we'll wed no man, save at our will."

When the Master of horse and Gilbert had been received by the Abbot, the former fell behind with Rohese's attendants, and Jocelin, of whom none took notice, spurred his jennet among those of his brother monks, and rode with them to the Abbey, giving scant answer to their eager questionings.

The Seneschal rode up beside John O'Dice, his brother, and after a fraternal greeting, the monk, nodding his head toward Jocelin, asked, "And what delayed the youngster?"

"Some woman's frippery stayed our lady, Brother John, an' the monk tarried to escort her, at her command."

"Aye, it's not the first time monk tarried at the command of rosy lips, Gilbert," chuckled the other, with a dig in the rib of his less robust relative which nearly unseated that worthy.

"How now, ye Abbey lubbers grow rough!" he protested peevishly. When he had righted himself again, he queried:

"But the Abbot seemeth wroth. Is it the way of him to so rage at such a small disobedience?"

"Nay," answered the monk, "our father ever ruleth his anger; but for some reason, he willed not thy lady at Bradfield now, and Jocelin should have returned to the Abbey ere his Highness, the prince, had come. But this delay of a few hours, the unlooked for coming hence of the Lady, and the untimely arrival of the prince and Queen mother, hath sorely discomposed his Lordship."

"What! the Prince and Queen at the Abbey? Zounds!" and old Gilbert straightened himself, involuntarily, in the saddle. "By the death of the saints, John O'Dice, then we really are going to court?"

"Yes, oldster, an' a right grand sight it is, for our Abbas Dominus keepeth open house, more like unto some rich and mighty lord, to my mind, than the superior of a handful of sack-clothed brethren."

But their gossip was brought to an end by the arrival of the cavalcade at the gate of the Abbot's house; here the

porter opened to their knock with a ready "Benedicite," and the monks entered and dispersed to their various quarters.

The Abbot and the rest of the party soon arrived; the brothers' Hospitlar came forth and the steeds disappeared as if by magic, Rohese's train gladly following a good brother to the refectory.

"I must make mine excuses, daughter," said the Abbot, "for not receiving thine henchmen, but indeed the hall, parlors, chambers; yea, even the butteries and kitchens of Bradfield house are thronged like a beehive, for Prince John and the Queen have large retinues."

"Ah, Madam," whispered Mary, giving her lady's arm a squeeze, "perhaps 'tis the prince himself the Abbot intends thee for. By our Lady, thou art good as queen already." Rohese only shook her head at her irrepressible tirewoman, but a red spot glowed on her fair cheek, and there was a flash in her eye which boded little good to the husband *forced* upon her, be he prince or peasant.

Surrounded by bowing courtiers, the Abbot led his ward up the marble steps into the arched vestibule of Bradfield house. They crossed a great hall; it was eighty feet long, with three aisles, and far down the vista Rohese could catch a glimpse of a dais half curtained from the rest of the hall, where the Prince and Queen Elinor sat with their lords and ladies about them, whilst music and laughter filled the air.

In the upper part of the hall there was a hurrying to and fro of richly dressed servants, pages and gentlemen, and a few passing monks, pausing to look on the scene with

wistful eyes. Along the walls on either side were brazen sconces holding great waxen tapers, and the Abbot signed with a finger, whereon the pontifical ring blazed like a tiny sun, to an attendant, who took a wax light from its socket, and went before them into the Abbot's own private parlor; a small, but elegant room, hung with purple damask, embroidered with the Episcopal insignia. Here the Abbot, laying aside cloak, cap and cross, seated himself, first drawing a stool near his own chair for Rohese. Mary withdrew to the other side of the parlor, and he began in a low voice.

"My daughter, it vexeth me sore that thou art come hence this day. Had Jocelin returned as I bade, I could have prevented thy coming."

"Nay, Father, I did but in courtesy beg that he wait, as I was desirous to come at once. Chide me not for an unimportant happening; what mattereth a few hours?"

"Unimportant! sayest thou?" The Abbot, frowned and tugged at his beard. "By my signet ring, Lady Rohese, thou thinkest as light of disregarding the wishes of thy Suzerain and Abbot as thy tercel would of answering not a page's whistle." The sternness of his tone somewhat disconcerted Rohese, but wise in her day, she only sighed, and looked down upon her folded hands as if to say, "I am an orphan maid; 'tis cruel to be unkind to such an one." Perhaps she conveyed this idea to Abbot Samson by that mysterious way women have of impressing men without the aid of speech. "Be it as it may," he continued in a milder tone.

"Ah well, man proposeth and woman doeth as she will.

'Twas ever thus; one of the soft and gentle sex will wreck a kingdom and wonder if men smile not thereat."

"Rohese, the Queen is here, and Prince John, too, with his dissolute followers. Think'st thou Bradfield a fit place for a maid, so filled with ramagious courtiers and pot-leachers?"

"Surely, my Lord, her Majesty will give me protection, and place me among her ladies?"

"Jesu forbid, my poor lamb, that thou shouldst fall into such a wolf den," the Abbot murmured to himself. "But it matters not now; thou art here, and the court is here, and we must entertain them with all due ceremony, and patience — I *must say patience;* 'tis enjoined by our order. But I like me not their visits," and the Abbot rose and paced the parlor for a few moments, a regal figure in his rich robes, far removed from the lowly monk who, travel stained, emaciated, naked of foot, and coarsely clad, once lay in the Abbey prison.

"Yet come, come," he said finally, "thou needst rest and food. Wilt sup with me, child, in this parlor?" Rohese, pleading fatigue, declined, and he rang for a page.

"Conduct the Lady de Cokefeld and her tirewoman to the Gate chamber, and send proper refreshments thither," and mistress and maid, having received his lordship's benison, followed their sprightly young guide through narrow corridors up a stair, and finally came to a long, low chamber which fronted the gateway. Adjoining this were sleeping rooms for Rohese and Mistress Mary, and here the page left them to arrange their belongings which they found piled there. He soon returned, however, with

a small pasty, some delicate tarts and a great goblet of hot spiced wine, which he set forth, and with an impudent wink at Mistress Mary, and a low bow to Rohese, was soon in the corridor outside their door. But ere he went whistling away, he paused to say knowingly, with a nod toward the hall below them,

"His Lordship, the Abbot, hath ordered this corridor door close barred."

CHAPTER X.

"Prayed the monk in deep contrition
For the sin of indecision —
Prayed for greater self-denial
In temptation and in trial."

STERN as was the Abbot's reprimand, and keenly as Jocelin felt his displeasure, he entered into a penance of a ten days' fare of bread and water, and banishment from the Abbot's court, almost gladly; for after all, rewards and punishments are from *within*, and the *real* punishment of the young monk consisted, not so much in remorse for his disobedience, but for the state of mind which prompted it.

The Abbot's rule was despotic. Held in absolute awe and reverence by his inferiors, he was obeyed unquestionably, and served in all humility, as a mighty spiritual ruler. As a temporal lord, his power was hardly less great; within the four crosses that bounded his wide domain, land and water were his; men, women and children his vassals, and mighty barons must uphold his standard, and obey his mandates, only second to the King's.

The townsman paid for pasturage on his commons; market men could not sell their goods until Abbey buyers picked, and even the Folkmote was presided over by an alderman, who held his horn of office from the Abbot.

Jocelin's failure to return to the Abbey was a grievous mistake, which by reason of frustrating the Abbot's plans,

bade fair to change the whole life of one for whom the monk would have sacrificed everything. But unaware of the result of his delay, and in his ignorance, attaching no significance to the presence of Prince John at Bradfield, Jocelin in his cell, pondered on his stay at De Cokefeld castle, and his enamourment of Rohese, until in a few days he began to be ashamed, and despised the sudden gust of passion which had so bent him. "I am no better than a reed shaken by the wind," he told himself, and finally having come to regard the whole happening as a temptation of the Devil, he began to liken himself to St. Anthony, and become wonderfully uplifted and exalted in spirit. After a day of such contemplation and much prayer, Jocelin felt that peace had once more come upon his perturbed spirit, and he set to work upon a special manuscript for the library. Having written the Canticles on a tinted parchment, he had begun to illumine a border of pomegranates and passion flowers around each page of these love songs of Solomon.

"My fault atoned for by fasting and prayer" he told himself, as he painted a royal purple petal. "Reinstated in our Father's favor, I can meet and greet the fairest of the land without an added heart beat. Verily the flesh is weak, but the spirit is the conqueror." But here Jocelin fell into the common error of inexperience, in imagining that any effect ever dies. A misdeed, be it ever so small, leaves a scar on the character of the committer which time cannot remove. Thoughts and deeds write life's history in indelible characters, which tears nor blood can erase. Jocelin also erred in thinking that the

flame of passion once kindled in a virgin heart can be quenched by any amount of reasoning or pious meditation. Love is a natural law, and whoever falls beneath its power must work out his own salvation for good or ill. Heredity, environment, mental and moral training, may elaborate the relations of man and woman, but ever the male will seek his mate, and the female yearn for hers, as truly as two fluids separated by a membrane will mingle by the law of osmosis.

As Jocelin painted and moralized, he paused to read a line of the text. Before the sight of a beautiful young woman had wakened in him visions of new possibilities in life, Jocelin had often wondered why it was said that the Rabbins of old forbade the young men of the synagogues the reading of the Canticles. Now he knew. Every word of the lover's passionate appeal started forth on the page, as if in letters of fire.

"Thou art fair, my love,
Thou hast dove's eyes within thy locks;
Thy lips are like a thread of scarlet."

Rohese's flower-like face came between him and the page again and again, till it so blurred beneath his eyes that he could not see to paint upon it; and in despair, he threw aside the brush and went out in the garden.

It was golden mellow day. A few leaves fluttered down now and then in gorgeous bouquets of scarlet and gold; the trees and sod still retained a tinge of green, and a golden haze seemed to mingle and melt into the rich landscape. Yet the sadness of adieu was in the air, as if the earth was mourning the passing of the fair summer, and

the pale blue sky seemed to bend low over the Abbey garden. From the forest sounded faintly the dull thud of the chopper's ax, and the acrid, pungent scent of burning leaves came from the orchard where Brother Tristian, his rough brown robe well kilted above his bare shanks, raked and burned the fallen leaves and the long sere grasses, droning a plaintive chant as he worked.

Jocelin paced up and down the walk with bowed head, unconsciously keeping time with the dirgelike song of old Tristian. His mood of religious exaltation had passed into one of fierce rebellion against the existing order of things, and a passionate crying out for the joys denied him by reason of the oath he had sworn at the high altar of St. Edmunds; though the training of a lifetime aided him in sternly resisting this new evil which assailed him and threatened to uproot its deepest teachings from the young monk's heart. "We are betrayed by what is false within," and false or true, this new inclination fought against all old ideas and feelings, and when Jocelin was most sure that he had defeated it, it threatened to conquer him. Thus he passed to and fro, the warning of the singer falling unheeded on his ear —

"Men are like grass,
Our lives they pass,
As swiftly as the river flows
Love's flower lifts its dew rimmed head;
It buds and blooms,
And then 'tis dead.
Till all at once we feel a cold,
And know that we are growing old."

But what dreamer or lover ever heeded warning until too late, when — the dreams fade, leaving him stranded upon the cruel rocks of reality. So Jocelin fought the fight with himself; the bitter battle of the spiritual arrayed against the natural man, until a brother came down the colonnade and called to him; but he was so engrossed that the other spoke several times before he lifted his head.

"Jossa, Jossa! my young brother," cried Walter, the Medicus, in a peevish tone, "Where art thy wits wool gathering? I have come but late from Bradfield house, and our Lord has deigned to forget thy little indiscretion, and wills that thou appear in his hall today to attend on him. His Highness holdeth court."

"Nay, not today, Brother Walter; not today;" impatiently murmured Jocelin, scarcely knowing what he said. "I must pass the time till compline in meditation and self-interrogation. I pray thee have me excused for this day from attendance at Bradfield."

"How now!" exclaimed Walter testily. "If thou showeth not appreciation of the Abbot's forgiveness, thou goest to pot. By our Lady, art verily ruined and wasted! Our Lord is not a patient man, young shaveling, and we oldsters had much ado to bring about this pardon. 'Twas by our intercession this revokement was made."

"If she had not wished me to love her, she should ne'er spoke me so fairly," muttered Jocelin. "Ehue!"

"What!" cried Brother Walter, greatly scandalized; his little light eyes narrowed to points with curiosity; "what sayest thou, my nonos?"

This brought Jocelin to his senses. "What say I, my frere? I but murmured a line of the Canticles. Depart in peace; I thank thee and thy confreres for their intercession, and will attend on his Lordship anon." Brother Walter trotted away in the rapid jerky pace peculiar to him, muttering to himself as he went, "I am little learned in the Scriptures, but I vow a candle to our Lady that young Jocelin ne'er learned such sayings from the great Solomon."

CHAPTER XI.

"A sort of naughty person,
Dealing with witches and with cungerers."

WHEN Brother Tristian had finished his task in the orchard, he left his rake in the garden house, and started back to his cell; traversing the cloister which faced a stretch of the Abbey wall, unbroken save by a postern gate. He took a turn up and down the cloister to stretch his aching limbs, and as he walked, he talked to himself in a low and confidential tone; a habit much complained of by his brethren, "He speaks with evil the one, who so converseth." said some more zealous ones who laying the matter before the Abbot, asked that their faulty brother be duly reprimanded. But the Abbot (with a twinkle in his eye) replied "If ye converse but with yourselves, there will be none to repeat your sayings." Thus did the father rebuke his over-zealous, tale-bearing sons, and little Brother Tristian talked to himself unmolested.

Brother Tristian was head gardener of the Abbey, and his soul was in his art. Each garden bed (they were neatly made in rows, with graveled walks between) bore its name cut in smooth chalk-rock like tiny white grave-stones. Onions, garlic, celery, lettuce, parsley, poppy, cabbage and carrots were there, each in its appointed place. And woe betide the careless assistant who mixed the seeds, or misplaced a stone. But the flower plot was Brother Tristian's joy and pride; and now, that fall had

come, and his out-door duties had ceased, he was planning a wonderful improvement therein. What this was, was a close secret, but the other monks knew that a rush light often burned at late hours in Brother Tristian's cell, and he was ever begging scraps of parchment from Jocelin, which he covered with lines and figures. Truly "Out of the fullness of the heart the mouth speaketh," for as Brother Tristian moved placidly up and down the empty cloister, he was all unconsciously giving to the autumn winds his cherished secret.

"Now," said he, with one lean little finger extended to draw imaginary lines in the air, "around the sundial will I plant them, my time-telling plants, and they shall be called the 'Virgin's clock,' in honor of our Lady. Zounds, 'twill be the triumph of all gardening. First will I plant me the Star of Jerusalem; it faileth never, but pops wide ope at the third hour to catch the first peep o' dawn; then the dandelion; it unfolds its cloth of gold at the fourth hour, and the other flowers, each at successive hours. At the fifth cometh my brave hawk's beard; then the viper's grass. The lettuce uncurleth its leaves at the seventh hour. For the next two I will have the Venus' looking-glass (a strange plant for an Abbey garden, methinketh), and the creeping hawkweed. To strike me ten I'll set purple juniper; then the Star of Bethlehem. Jerusalem's Star again for, lazy little Jack-go-to-bed-at-noon, it shutteth its eyes at midday. To tell the first hour after midday, the succory will unfold, then the squill; at the third, maid Marigold bares her bosom to the sun. Ah, my beautiful flower clock! The Abbot himself will come to see it, and

Dunstan of Woolpit will go mad with envy that he bethought him not of such a fair invention."

"The four o'clock and wall flower I'll plant to tell the fourth and fifth hour, and at the sixth the lovely primrose of evening shall ope its delicate petals to the sound of the vesper bell. Jocelin of Brakelond may illumine his Missals with rare floral counterfeits, but who can make the pretty blossoms *grow* so well as old Tristian? 'Twill be the wonder of the age."

"Aye, wonders never cease, brother," said a low, cracked voice at his ear, and Tristian glanced up to see an aged woman in a scarlet cloak, peering at him through a cloister arch. She was very, very old. She wore a close black cap with some tatters of a rusty black veil hanging over it, and mingling with a few whisps of dry bleached hair, which clung round her seamed brow like dead leaves on a branch, denuded by winter winds. Her eyes were mere hollows, with one glistening point of light far behind their rheum reddened lids, as if some wild creature crouched, within an ancient ruin waiting to spring upon its prey. Her face could hardly be called wrinkled, as no continuous lines were set therein; but both face and hands were like withered petals of a yellow rose which has been crinkled and creased, then parched by the sun. The toothless mouth, with its blackened cracked lips, added to her weirdness; as did the great black staff on which she leaned, for its handle was cut into a semblance of a cat's head, with yellow jewels for eyes, which seemed to blink at the startled monk.

"Godamercy! How camest thou hither, dame? No

woman entereth these walls save by the Abbot's leave."

"Monks and witches have no sex, old frere. An' I wot if thy Abbot keepeth woman out of *anything*, he will do more than mankind hath done since man's wife was made in Eden. How came I hither? Gramacy, by yon postern! Thou wert so bent on extolling thy weeds, I entered unobserved."

"But that postern gate was close locked, dame. I noted it as I passed with its bar well in the socket" stammered Tristian in dismay, tremblingly running his fingers through his scanty locks, which literally stood on end, and crossing himself before addressing his dread visitor.

"Odds heartlings! old shaveling; hath never heard of the witch of Ely, who hath but to point her staff at any barred door or portcullis, and open it swingeth? And now, wight, stand not staring here!" But Brother Tristian only looked at her stupidly, muttering to himself, "A witch; a cungerer."

"Along with me," she cried impatiently, striking her staff on the stones. Whereupon, it seemed to Tristian that the cat's eyes flashed fire.

"Whither?" he queried in a faint voice.

"To Bradfield by some quiet way. I would speak with the Lady De Cokefeld."

"Why went thou not in at the Abbot's gate, then? Why pounce upon a poor monk with thy horrid staff? Mary save me!" expostulated Tristian feebly.

"Dolt, did I care to become the gazing stock of all the popinjays of two courts? Haste thee; haste thee, monk, a secret passage to the Abbot's house."

"A *secret* way? I know of no way, save the walk down yonder terrace."

"Then to the church, old fearful, to the church," the witch of Ely cried, stamping her foot. But here Tristian rebelled. Timorous as he was by nature, and much afraid of witches, he would not conduct a witch within the sacred walls of St. Edmunds.

"Never! 'Twould be a sacrilege."

"Ha, ha; never, sayest thou, sir gardener? Then I'll set a spell on thy flower-clock, and the summer's sun shall never shine on it. Wither leaf, and shatter bloom, old canker blossom."

"Nay, nay," interposed Tristian, now thoroughly terrified. What was the sanctity of the Abbey to the safety of his darling flowers?

"Hither, follow me, dame. Quickly, for if I am seen with a woman in followance bethink thee of the scandal." This amused the beldame, and she followed his reluctant steps with a toothless grin at his disgruntlement. When they had entered the church, she walked behind him up the main aisle, counting its pillars as she went. When they were half way to the altar she paused, and passing through an arch, hobbled briskly behind the carved screen of pierce-timber work at the north of the choir. Here she paused and saying "Farewell, old wight," she disappeared; right into the great carved pillar, it seemed to Brother Tristian, but though he searched till the shadows of evening drove him from the church, he could find no signs of an opening therein and finally left the church and hurried to his cell.

"Woe is me! Woe is me!" he cried continually, beating his breast and shaking his head. "The brethren were right; in speaking to myself I have communed with the evil one, and he hath finally appeared in this guise. I have been tempted by the Devil, and have yielded; Satan is turned loose in the Abbey," and he leaned his head against the stone wall of his cell, while tears coursed down his sallow old cheeks. "Woe is me; woe is me!"

CHAPTER XII.

"Aye, it is He who rides at the King's right hand
Draw to the side."

JOCELIN was chaplain and secretary to the Abbot; so his summons to Bradfield was not, in itself, indicative of his Lord's restored favor, for if the Abbot had business with his royal guest, he would stand in need of his secretary. So Jocelin went on his way unelated at the summons, and in much vexation at his carelessness in so nearly revealing the secret of his love to the gossip of the Abbey. He passed down a terrace, through many enclosures, by divers paths into a small yardway, and so, through a private door into the corridor on which the Abbot's parlor opened, and entered the room unobserved by its occupants. Abbot Samson sat there with the Bishops of Ely and Waltham and several dignitaries of the Church, whilst before them stood the leading Advocates of the Abbey, the Earls Faulkenbridge, Albune and my Lord of Clare, with Earl Bigot, a friend of Prince John. The Advocates (as were most of the Anti-Regent Barons and noblemen of that time) were clean shaven, with hair cut short on the neck; but the courtier, like his friend and master, the Prince, wore the pointed beard and curling locks, filletted with a golden ribband, the court had adopted in contempt of its smooth-faced, short-locked opposers. As they stood thus, several half-audible comments on Bigot's attire passed between the Advocates; for in those days gentlemen had not the

manners which at a later age, made England's Society noted, and, men, like children, (who are the least artificial of creatures), spoke what was in their minds with brusque freedom.

"A fur pelisse, like a woman, by my halidame!" murmured Albune.

"Thsich!" answered that rugged giant, Faulkenbridge, sucking his teeth in disgust. "So pricked and spruce a popinjay I have never seen." If Bigot heard these uncomplimentary remarks, he gave no heed to them; but whispered from time to time with the Bishop of Waltham, who finally, with much hesitation, addressed the Abbot in a low voice; whereupon Abbot Samson, rising from his seat, exclaimed: "My Lord, I was a soldier ere I was a monk, an' by my good sword and my silver cross, I will don mail again ere I humble the pride, or sully the honor of St. Edmunds. I'll not concede away our rights," and he struck a blow in the air as if his clenched hand again held a sword.

"Nay, Father," expostulated Bigot in a soft, bland voice, "the Prince but claimeth *his* rights. His Lordship, the Bishop, tells me this wardship was promised the Prince, by Prior Roger, on the day of thy election. Nay, I know not if he said not, by Brother Samson himself." The Abbot's face was red, and he patted his silken slipper. "By our Lady, this fellow hints at Simony," he muttered. Here the Bishop of Waltham broke in hurriedly, anxious to avert the gathering storm.

"Nay, my Lord, 'twas the Prior who proffered it; an

exchange. This wardship for the right of election." The Abbot fairly bristled with rage.

"Since when do Priors give our wards in marriage, and Princelings elect Abbots? The Bishop of Winchester long ago held that the power of king-making lay in the clergy, and he proved it, in that he raised Mathilda to the throne. Knows the Prince no history? Ye who are his tutors teach him illy, methinks. It takes more than the instillation of loose principles (which ye have so artfully set about) to make a king, Bigot. By my halidame! John heaps insult on injury when he demands the hand of the daughter of my noblest Advocate for a pander, a spend-thrift, a libertine, and last, but not least, by my troth, a bastard, without a cross in his pouch."

Displeased as the Advocates were by the Regent's demands, they exchanged glances of consternation at this. For while many of the nobles of England were opposed to Prince John, there were few who would have dared to thus oppose and criticize the ruler of the Realm.

"No head is safe which owneth tongue so hot!" whispered Faulkenbridge to Clare.

"Nay, nay, e'en *though* it wear a mitre," answered the other. Albune was much disturbed and the Bishop of Waltham was white with apprehension. Only Bigot maintained his composure; his handsome dark face suave and smiling as ever.

"Surely the ruler of England can command his vassals, be they ever so high, Father," he protested, stroking back a perfumed curl which had fallen across his rosy cheek. This was the last straw.

"My Lord," said the Abbot in cold fury, "thou forgettest that the Regency lies with the Church; as it is, *we* owe no allegiance to the Regency or the Crown, and of a surety the Pope will uphold us in this just refusal. Announce to His Highness that we will give him audience when he has supped. My chaplain celebrates Vespers in the chapel, my Lords," the Abbot turned his back squarely on Bigot, who biting his lips, made a hurried exit, followed by the Bishop, who seemed to be mumbling a prayer, as he pattered after the irate Earl.

As they supped a monk entered and announced that the Prioress Rosamund and three nuns were in the courtyard of the palace; having been o'ertaken by night, on a journey from Ely, and craved the hospitality of the Abbot. The truth was, the Prioress, on hearing of John's coming and her son's proximity, for the Favorite ever accompanied his brother, could not forbear to hasten to him (regardless of the presence of the Queen), trusting to her tardy appearance, and plausible story to gain entrance at Bradfield. Jocelin, who from the elder monks, well knew the story of Rosamund de Clifford, looked questioningly at the Abbot, expecting the peremptory dismissal of this illtimed visitor; but the Abbot's thoughts were not on any ancient quarrel of Henry's wife and mistress; and then too, perchance he cared not for any humiliation which the Prioress' appearance would cause the Queen and her son. "Why not," he said aside to Jocelin, "The bastard is here, why not the dam?" And he gave instructions to admit the Prioress.

Throughout the meal, Jocelin sat pale and silent, scarcely touching his food. Through what had passed in the

Abbot's parlor, he had realized for the first time what this visit to Bradfield house meant for Rohese. The Prince, in demanding her hand for his favorite, had displeased her powerful guardian. Here was a ray of hope; but it flickered dimly for a moment, and then flared out, leaving Jocelin's heart all the more desolate for its faint glimmering. If this suitor was ineligible, the Abbot, no doubt, had others in view. Perhaps Rohese had a lover already, for among all the Abbey Advocates, there was surely some one for whom she had a preference. The thought was as wormwood, and he shuddered at the bitterness which swept over his heart. Faulkenbridge for all his burly frame and forty years, was good to look at, and my Lord of Clare had a handsome son, his esquire, famed for his beauty and daring. "She is not for such as thou, an' were she free thy oath of celebacy separates thee from her," he told himself.

The Abbot noting Jocelin's melancholy, naturally supposed his young secretary was grieving over his past disobedience, and as they went toward the audience hall, he laid his hand kindly on the young monk's shoulder —

"Hast prayed and fasted, my son?"

"Yea, Father."

"And repented thy sin?"

"Yea, indeed, indeed!" Jocelin answered earnestly, touched by the gentleness of his usually stern superior.

"Then go in peace, my son. God's benison on thee!" And Jocelin, kissing his hand, fell back among the attendant monks; while the Abbot led the way into the audience chamber. But neither blessing nor pardon could give

peace to poor Jocelin, as he brought up the rear of the procession, with hot eyes glaring fiercely for a sight of Geoffrey de Clifford, who had dared stretch forth a rapacious hand toward the idol set up in his passionate heart.

Prince John had prolonged his feast unduly, being much of a gourmand and careless of the proprieties, which demanded his withdrawal from the board ere his host arrived. So he now rose with his court, and withdrew to his dais at the farther end of the hall, leaving the surprised prelate and his monks to pass around the devastated table; while all was confusion; monks skurrying to their places behind the Abbot's chair, courtiers hurrying to their post around the Prince, and the ladies in waiting gathering about the queen. Though, such a slight was too obvious to pass unnoticed, the Abbot made no comment; except to command the removal of the unsightly remnants of the meal.

Prince John and the Queen slightly bent their heads as the Abbot passed them, and he, with extended hand, murmured the usual "*Pax Vobiscum*," though the flash in his eye boded little of peace.

CHAPTER XIII.

"Through the hushed, admiring throng
She went with stately steps along."

It was a sight worth the seeing — this gathering of the noblest and mightiest of the realm. The great, arched hall lit by many tapers; shining on the purple and silver of the Abbot's livery; the scarlet and gold of the royal household; the monks' black robes, which but accentuated the brilliancy of the jewel-decked courtiers and ladies. Prince John's dress of crimson, falling to the middle leg, was gold-belted and a jeweled pendant hung from it between his knees. He wore an under tunic of golden cloth, a green lined mantle, red hose and collar, and sleeves of gold be-gemmed cloth. The Queen sat beside him, a stately, portly dame past life's meridian, her clear dark skin but slightly wrinkled, and the strong mind presaged by her large dark eyes and Roman nose was fully confirmed by the massive jaw and firm unsmiling lips. Her dark robes were 'broidered in golden crescents, and the diamond diadem glittered in her silvery hair like frost crystals on a snowbank.

Near the entrance of the hall on either side were the Abbot's soldiers, and the royal bodyguard; the latter conspicuous by reason of a great banner, bearing three lions rampant, which the cunning hand of Rosamund had long ago embroidered for the dead King.

John was first to break the pause following the Abbot's

entrance: "We cry thee pardon, Dominus, that we dallied so long o'er our wine noting not that the hour had passed. But if we receive thee not in all seemliness, blame thyself, who hath so royally feasted us."

"Though something I might 'plain, Prince," answered the Abbot, smiling sarcastically, "'twere passing strange should I find myself amazed, for if your Highness remembers so slight an occasion, you will bethink you that I, as elected Abbot of St. Edmunds first kissed the Princely hand as it held a roasted lark's leg."

The Prince, not knowing if these words were uttered in jest or reproof, hesitated before replying, his cheek flushing under its flaxen beard; then, choosing to see but the humorous side of the happening, said laughingly —

"By the rod, Abbot Samson, more than one Prince of the Church hath kissed a greezy paw; for methinketh I have heard of Abbots who had women-cooks or focariæ; though, Gramacy, the *fellowship* stopped neither at board nor hearth."

"Come," interrupted the Abbot impatiently, "let us speak of weightier matters. Your Highness, by Earl Bigot, hath made demands for the disposing of a certain wardship." The Prince turned petulantly to Bigot, who stood near with Counsellor Geoffrey:

"Roger, you spoke me not of this."

"My Prince," responded the courtier with easy familiarity, "when I sought thee after the Abbot's audience thou wert at table, and forbade the delivery of any such rude pratings," casting a spiteful glance at the Abbot.

"True, true; I said you nay, I remember, and you pressed

not the matter," responded John hastily, not anxious that the Abbot should hear his disrespectful words repeated, "Come hither now, sorry herald, and deliver thou the Abbot's message, though that were useless with his Lordship in the presence." But Bigot, who much desired to keep peace between his master and the Abbot for a time at least, hastily moved to the royal side, and, in a low voice gave John a very softened version of the Abbot's cavalier refusal to transfer the wardship of the Lady de Cokefeld. He represented the Abbot as loth to surrender so rich a wardship and desiring of a fief in another hundred, as a bonus for the forfeiture.

John waved him away — "Pooh, pooh, Sir Abbot, thou art right — 'tis a rich wardship, and I confirm thy decision," and ere the astonished Abbot could speak, he went on, "but Father, bring forth this richly dowered ward of thine and let us see what thou art so loth to part with." Seeing by the Abbot's face that a refusal of this was imminent, the Prince motioned to Bigot who went out. Dumbfounded at the good humor with which the Prince seemingly received the curt refusal of his demands, Samson answered more gently than hitherto.

"I pray thee, your Highness, have ye my ward excused. The maid is unaccustomed to courts, and would be discomforted at appearing before such a great company. Besides, what mattereth her appearance to thee?"

"By the blood!" exclaimed the Prince with a sly glance at Geoffrey, "Should I not wish to see my sister that is to be? Zounds, if she be fair, I'll salute her right brotherly."

"Thou art ever ready to so salute, my Prince," murmured Geoffrey in his ear.

The Abbot's face expressed both anger and bewilderment. "Highness," he began, but his utterance was stayed by a commotion at the hall's entrance.

Henry Bigot had not far to go in search of the Lady de Cokefeld; indeed, she was on her way to the hall when she met the Prince's messenger. Ignorant of the contested wardship, and unconscious that the Abbot but kept her in retirement to hide her from the two greatest libertines of a gross age, after some days of semi-captivity, she felt a great curiosity to see for herself what the royal visitors were like. So, knowing Samson would refuse her permission to pay court to Queen Elinor, she had privately dispatched a messenger to her Majesty that very evening, craving permission to attend on her, as was her right, as the daughter of so noble a subject as Adam de Cokefeld. Permission granted, Rohese now entered the audience chamber escorted by Bigot, and attended by Mistress Mary and Mordred, bearing her trailing skirts.

"Holy Saint Francis!" exclaimed one of the monks. "By Jesu!" cried more than one courtier none too softly, and the Prince's heart gave a leap within him, as he murmured, "By Christ's blood! The fairest maid in all England." And indeed, Rohese was fair enough to make any pulse throb quickly. As she came toward the dais, Geoffrey's sensual face lit up as he feasted his eyes on her loveliness, and stepped forward that she might approach him closely as she passed. Already he had thought "Nay Jack can have the chink; I'll enjoy the maid."

Rohese was dressed in damask robes of shades of green and blue, curiously wrought with pearls, so that one saw therein all the hues of the peacock's plumage; her veil gleamed silver white against the rich fabric, and a fan of peacock plumage sparkled in her hand. Her richly tinted hair lay along her back in two great plaits, bound here and there with ropes of pearls, the braids falling far down her train, gleaming there like two red-gold serpents. A murmur of admiration went up from the crowded hall, and Rohese, fearful of the Abbot's displeasure, and frightened at her own timerity, quickened her pace, and after bending over the Prince's hand, knelt at the Queen's feet. Elinor, her stern face grown kind, lifted the blushing girl, and with a few words of greeting and encouragement, seated her on a cushion at her feet. And John eagerly leant forward from his throne to whisper to her something which made her blush the more, though she answered him only by a slight shake of the head.

Thus she sat, the cynosure of all eyes, for all the world must stare now, as all the world — that is, that part which formed the Prince's court being well trained in Sadii's maxim — "Should the Prince at noonday say, 'It is night,' declare you behold the moon and stars;" praised the maid Prince John had called the fairest in all England.

And poor Jocelin, chagrined at their gazing, looked upon her radiant beauty too, and grinding his teeth, dug his nails deep into the flesh in the jealous rage and despair of impotent love, while in his ears there rang the minstrel's rhyme: —

"There dwelt a page in castle Clare,
And ah he loved his Lady so!
And yet she moved so proud and fair —
She did not care — she did not know
She did not care nor know."

CHAPTER XIV.

"By the grave, my Lords, which made me
Orphaned girl and dowered lady,
I deny you wife and ward."

"SURELY, Prince," said Samson, "Roger of Bigot delivered not my answer aright."

"Yea, my Lord, he told me thou demurred somewhat relinquishing so rich a holding. An' by our Lady, I blame thee not, since mine eyes hath looked upon the most precious part of the trove. Ah, a monk hath ever an eye for beauty!"

"Demurred somewhat!" thundered the Abbot. "An' this to me! Am *I* to be juggled with in mine own castle as a nurse dandles a puny child who frets and will not take its pap? I deny thee this wardship, John of England, and will hold this female Advocate, and bestow her hand at mine own pleasure."

In the tense silence the Prince's strenuous breathing could be heard, as flinging aside his mother's restraining hand, he rose, and with a rage-purpled countenance, shook his fist at the Abbot.

"Deny, deny! God's blood, *thou* deny! An Abbot whom I created but yesterday. Thou forgettest whose subject thou art, proud monk!"

"The Church is subject to none save the most high God, Prince John Sansterre. The ring and the crosier are emblems of that power no *king* can bestow! Beware lest thou bring upon thee the interdict of the Church by seeking

to snatch from her, her just perquisites." At this direct threat of excommunication, a murmur went round the hall.

In the middle ages when tyranny and superstition were rife, excommunication was the iron sceptre by which the church ruled Prince and subject. The excommunicated were shunned like lepers by their friends, families and servants; and by any communication with persons beneath this dread ban, a lesser excommunication or privation of the sacraments was incurred, to be lifted only by penitence and absolution.

John felt that he had gone too far. This Samson was a formidable enemy, who, besides wielding spiritual power, was not without material means of wreaking his vengeance, for John's quick eye had caught the glint of steel from beneath the robes of an hundred monks, and saw that the corridor outside was filled with men, who, though they were dressed as servitors, each bore in his belt a Sheffield blade, and each hand went to hilt at sound of Samson's voice. Vainly had Bigot assayed to stay his master's wrath, as had Geoffrey and the Queen. Now, no restraint was needed. John was a coward; one who struck in the dark; or at best, only when all power lay behind him, and he knew that with Richard alive he was never secure. There was one more card to play. If Rohese would accept him as guardian, the Advocates might side with her against the Abbot, and this result in the consummation of John's plans. The beauty of the maid had fired his incontinent blood, and the fief of de Cokefeld was rich; Geoffrey was clamoring for recognition of his services; the country

already groaned under taxes, and with coffers depleted; he must have money. So his tone was conciliatory.

"How now, my Lord Abbot, forgive my untimely heat! Let us not quarrel *e'en* o'er such a pretty puppet as this. But hath the maid no say? Methinks the Advocates who so long served under her father's banner should somewhat consider her preference." The Advocates visibly approved of this, as they thought the Abbot's proceedings too aggressive and masterful by far.

"Mary's heart, he acts as if he were the Pope himself," my Lord of Clare said to Faulkenbridge.

"Thou art right, my Bucco. Father Hugo was ever ruled by our decisions. This one hath not even questioned our opinions."

"See, sweet," went on the Prince, mellifluously lifting Rohese's head and pointing to Geoffrey, who struck an effective attitude, and regarded the shrinking girl with a bold glance, he intended to be enticing and subduing; "Wilt not exchange the dreary life in thine old Keep for the gayety of court? Become the Prince's ward, lady, and there stands a gallant husband ready for thee; spruce and pricked, who will govern thee gently, though he love thee hotly. What say'st thou, pretty minion?"

Obscured by the crowd stood a tall slender nun whose white tunic and pectoral, black hooded cloak and ebon staff proclaimed her the Prioress Rosamund, and, forgetful of prudence, she now pushed forward the better to comprehend that which so nearly concerned her son. Ten years younger than Queen Elinor, her Greek features still retained their reposeful beauty, and dispite her habit she was a

handsome, stately woman. The noise of her movement, though slight, was noticed by the Queen, who turning, found herself face to face with her hated rival of old. The almond-shaped eyes of the Prioress contracted, (they were green as the sea on a sunlit day, and flecked with gold like the jeweled eyes of a toad); her thin lips tightened into a scarlet line, as she proudly and defiantly met the withering glance of Elinor. Time and circumstances may teach *men* to forget but women, in whose hearts the fires of jealousy are kindled, hate always — through life — yea, after death.

"Remove that wench!" commanded Elinor to the captain of her guard, her pointing finger shaking with anger. The green eyes flashed, and the thin lips of the Prioress opened as if to speak, but Geoffrey, who had been furtively watching his mother during the Prince's proffer, now caught her eye. Like Henry of old, he ruled this scheming, haughty woman with a glance, and warned by his look she held her peace. The Abbot here interposed.

"Madam," he said to the Queen, "the lady Prioress is my guest." So Elinor, biting her lips at this public rebuke, said no more, being forced to sit and watch the white cat-like face of her enemy light up with a triumphant smile.

"What say'st thou, Lady de Cokefeld?" urged the Prince.

Rohese was at bay. Abhoring the proffered change of guardianship, she more abhored the proffered bridegroom; yet how dared she speak before so great a company, and reveal to the Prince the thoughts which surged within her

proud young mind? So she only shook her head, drawing away from the familiar touch of the Prince.

Abbot Samson then said to her: "Answer thou, Rohese, wilt have as a guardian the Prince, and give thy hand and fortune to Geoffrey de Clifford?" Rohese shuddered at this name and stole a contemptuous glance at the bastard; this was the son of ill-famed Rosamund de Clifford; this libertine, execrated by the parents of England. (For like a serpent, his slimy trail had gone over many a fair home, leaving shame and misery in its wake.) My Lady of Clare had told her much of this man. To her surprise, a hand now came stealing upon hers, and looking up she saw the Queen with an intent frown watching her face eagerly and warningly, whilst the royal hand pressed hers encouragingly. Thus supported, Rohese, rising bright-eyed and composed, turned to the Abbot:

"Nay, nay, my dear, new-found father, though his Highness load me with jewels, and set me among the noblest and fairest of his court, I'd not exchange my *Liege* and my guardian. And by my Christendom! I am well content to bide a maid, an' God wot a de Cokefeld would ne'er mate with Rosamund Clifford's son." The Abbot smiled a stern approval. John looked blankly astonished. The Queen patted her hand kindly, and murmured, "Well fought, little de Cokefeld." But Rohese, sinking back on her cushion, frightened at her own vehemence, felt but one eye upon her. The Prioress glared from her corner like a tigress ready to leap upon its prey, and Rohese felt that this must be the mother of Geoffrey, and realized that she had made an implacable enemy,

"Thou hast had thy answer," said Samson grimly. "Come, Lady de Cokefeld, it grows late; maids should not bide from bed so late."

"A merry revel to you all, my guests. Your Highness, there are here some right skilful gleemen who will more than compensate for our heavy company. Ho there, master of the hall, bring forth the choicest wines, and let the music play!" And as a gay madrigal struck up, the Abbot, with a haughty obeisance to his royal guests, led Rohese from the hall, followed by her attendants, and the long line of monks, with eyes bent low, and meekly folded hands. The Queen and her ladies presently retired, and the Advocates and the rest of the court were left to nightly revelry; though John, Geoffrey and Bigot sat moodily apart, while the music rang, and the cup went round.

As they went toward the stairway leading to the Gate chamber, Rohese said penitently, "I pray thee, my Lord, forgive my coming hither against thy commands. I was but curious to see a great court assembled."

"Well, thou'st had thy wish, girl. Woman ne'er obeyed God or man gainst her desire since first she disobeyed in Eden. But thou'lt pay dearly for this night's work, I fear. Once the wolf smells blood he'll not leave the trail. And Geoffrey de Clifford has been flouted by the fairest maid in England. Well for thee, child, that Samson's strong arm wields the Crosier, instead of Hugo's. 'Tis a lucky chance thou'rt housed with me, as it has turned; for the Prince is minded to take thee by force, Rohese, I saw it in his eye; and over God's forbade when *he's* done with thee, why thou'lt be *fit* for his Favorite's wife," and the

Abbot ground his teeth as he turned away, leaving Rohese with scarcely strength to climb the stair, assisted by wide-eyed Mistress Mary, half ready to weep, seeing her lady so disturbed. Slowly they passed up the great marble stair; the attendant at its foot extinguished his taper and went away, and 'twas then a dark figure stole from behind a pillar nearby, and murmuring, "O my sweet, my brave, lady," kissed the stones her feet had trod ere he departed into the gloom like one of the shadows of the night.

CHAPTER XV.

"Hast thou, as yet, conferred with the cunning witch?"

THE next morning Rohese sat up in bed with a start; though hardly awake, she felt there was some alien influence about her. Looking through the open door of her apartment across the Gate chamber, at Mistress Mary's door, she saw that, contrary to custom, it was closed. Had her tirewoman wakened, and gone to the buttery for their breakfast? No, 'twas too early, as the grey light showed. Rohese turned restlessly on her pillow, and then cowered 'neath her bed coverings, for on a low stool in the center of the little room she glimpsed a figure so weird that she hastened to shut out its sight. At this, a rattling, "Ho, ho," proceeded from the intruder, and Rohese, reassured by this sound that her visitor was human, summoned courage to peep from beneath the coverlid.

"How, now, my little milk-liver! 'Tis many a year since I visited thee. Alackaday, to find thee grown such a fine coward. Fie upon thee, De Cokefeld's heir! Art frightened at Bernice of Ely? Hast forgotten 'Old nurse?'"

"Oh!" Rohese came fully into view now, and sat up, curiously regarding her visitor, none other than that ancient beldame who had so frightened Brother Tristian.

"Welcome, dame," she cried; "now I *do* know thee, but, Mother, how quaintly thou art dressed. Set my fear to that, and the fact that 'tis ten years since I last saw thee."

"Lawk, I'm not strangely decked. I but wear the red

and black livery of my master. Hast not heard of the witch of Ely?" Rohese looked at her with startled eyes, crossing herself mechanically, and murmuring her old childish prayers — "From all sorcerers, witches and dark and evil things, good saints, deliver us," before she began falteringly:

"I wot not, dame Bernice — "

"Of course! Ten years agone, when thy father was alive, I had no more mind to be burned at the stake, or wear the bridle, than now; and when my yearly visitations were made to my nurseling's child, I donned the russet gown and kerchief of a village wife. Thy father was a stark man, girl, and mad 'gainst sorcery."

Rohese gazed on the crone wonderingly. "And didst really nurse my granddam, dame?"

"Aye, that I did, from two years old; and by paddocks maw, I saw the Lady Francis, thy dame, born, married and buried, and lifted thee in these arms, a red and squirming brat, when first thou camest to this weary world. Wonder not then, that I came hither to seek thee, e'en in mine enemy's stronghold. The Church doth ever love a witch — a-sizzling." And Dame Bernice chuckled at her grim jest.

"And now what I have come so far to tell must soon be told ere thy minion scratch at the door I've locked so fast upon her. I was stayed last night on my way hither, for the Abbot's silver cross hung on the secret panel by which I strove to gain entrance into Bradfield; so I could not pass but needs must spend the night as best I might in the passage till, at cock crow, I 'scaped by another way and came hither in search of thee, too late to stay thy attendance

on the court." When she had shown that she knew all that had occurred in the audience chamber, she continued:

"Well, well, when the bowl is broke one may not readily pick up the spilled meal. Woman's curiosity will ever prove her undoing, as it did long ago for the seven wives of the blue bearded one. Past is past. But hark ye now, puppet, an' heed my warning. Two nights agone I drew the magic-circle; called Uriel, Gabriel, Raphael and Michael to guard its quarters, (for I'd writ thy name therein, an' wished thee well), that no evil influence should fall upon thee; but spite o' my charms, Uriel's blue flame paled, and the black shadow crept o'er the border. Outside my hut a bandog howled, and Paddock, my chitty toad, crept closer 'neath my gown. Then, by the pentagon, an' by the magic words, I summoned Asmodus, my familiar; and that sweet fiend and I did converse heavily on thee till cock crow. Heed, heed, Rohese, heed —

"Beware ye of a black, black robe,
Beware ye of a curled pate.
By all the powers of dark Hecate,
Return ye home ere 'tis too late."

Twice hath my black grimalkin mewed,
Twice wilt thou be assailed.
Death and shame shall hover o'er,
With tears thy cheek be paled.

Heed ye — now the witch's word,
Heed thee now this warning —

'Ware of the robe and tonsured head,
Beware this very morning."

Half chanting this doggerel the witch of Ely passed from the room, and vanished; as quickly and silently as a drop of dew in the sunshine. Rohese sprang from her bed, and rushed to Mary's door. The girl was soon 'roused and the two sat side by side on the little tirewoman's couch, wrapped in its covers, and talking excitedly of the queer incident, their teeth chattering with the autumn chill. Mary was first to recover herself, and exercising loving tyranny, sent Rohese back to bed while she dressed, and after bustling about kindling a fire in the brazier, assisted her lady to robe.

As Rohese breakfasted, a message came from the Abbot—"Stay thou fast within the Gate chamber, keeping it close locked." Rohese pouted, for she wished much to speak with the Abbot regarding the warning of dame Bernice. But, mindful of her late disobedience, and its consequences, through the day she and Mary busied themselves over their 'broidery frames, or the maid listened while the lady read aloud from the "Lives of the Saints," bound in quaint wooden covers 'bossed with silver. Toward evening they had the excitement of watching the royal visitors depart, and, hidden behind the curtain, saw the Queen's horse-litter move off, followed by the Prince and his two friends on horseback, who nodded but a surly farewell to the Abbot, hospitably standing in the doorway to see his guests depart. The Advocates and their attendants withdrew; the gates were shut and locked, the troop of soldiers, hitherto dis-

guised as servitors, departed to their quarters. Just before vespers, Rohese sent Mistress Mary with a message to Abbot Samson, desiring an audience, and when she had returned with his permission, Rohese arrayed herself for the interview, murmuring half to herself, as Mary combed her amber locks and bound them with fillets of gold: "At least one part of the witch's warning cannot come true; and she herself said 'past is past.' No need to 'ware a black robe now." But the witch erred not; had Rohese gone in the morning to the Abbot's parlor she would not have had the meeting which proved the undoing of both herself and Jocelin.

CHAPTER XVI.

"This love will undo us all.
O Cupid, Cupid!"

VESPERS over and the tapers lit, Rohese descended to the Abbot's parlor; where she sat waiting his return from the chapel. She was a little pale, for the past excitement told upon her. Besides, the witch's "'Ware the black robe" kept sounding in her ears. So her state of mind was very disturbing, and her most disquieting thoughts were of Jocelin. She was beginning to believe that the handsome monk felt more warmly toward her than was compatible with his vows; and while her girlish vanity was pleased, she was annoyed; for though she was interested in Jocelin, (a far different feeling from the tender regard in which she held Henry of Leicester), she was repelled at the thought that a *monk* loved her.

How does a woman know a man loves her? The day of realistic novels has forever banished from romances the fallacy that she, palpitating with surprised modesty knows it for the first time when *told*. Nay, should the good old fashion of wooing change, and man, never uttering the dulcet speech of courtship, simply say, "Marry me," the eternal feminine would continue blushing consciously when the mate-to-be came near, and would go to the altar without one love-word, needing no passionate phrases to tell what she had long since found out by instinct.

As Rohese sat leaning her head against the purple of the

Abbot's chair, the object of her cogitation passed the doorway, looking neither to right or left. He looked so wan and despairing that all her woman's heart went out to him, and she murmured his name almost unconsciously. Surely he could not have heard it! Rohese shrank back into the chair, chiding herself for giving away to impulse, but if the *eyes* of Love *are blind*, his *ear* is never closed to the Beloved's voice; and Jocelin, already past the door, stopped, paused irresolutely, and turning, walked straight into the room and up to her. "I felt something draw me hither," he said simply.

"Nay, sir monk, thy fasting hath sent vapors into thy head," Rohese said lightly, trying to gain time, and entrenching herself behind coquetry, as foolish little fish hide among the reeds of a pond; their gold and silver but showing the brighter 'gainst the dark background. Jocelin was in no mood for trifling.

"Lady Rohese," he demanded, "hast thought of me since coming hither?"

"There are many monks here, brother, and as one black gown is like another, is it not likely that sight of them would bring thee to mind?" "Yea," (petulantly) "in my dreams I have seen whole processions of thee, by our Lady! clambering up a rocky way; with wan faces and eyes that burn into my very soul."

"And so thou dost think of me? Ah, methinks thy dreaming is but an echo of the wild sweet fantasies which beset *my* sleep. Listen, Rohese, I too, in dreams, have seen myself tread with blood-stained feet, a pathway strewn thick with briars and stones; but far, far up on

the heights, a tress of gold hair gleamed, and an angel face smiled down on me. 'Twas thou, Rohese, 'twas thou who stood there, with alabaster hands outstretched to welcome me. Thy voice's sweetest music breathed my all unworthy name; and straight I gained to where thou stood'st, and weary, bleeding laid me at thy feet. Then thou didst bend compassionately over me; and thy gleaming tresses shut us from the world; Ah, blood of saints, beloved! Then sounded a strain of music faintly, clear as trills the thrush in the dewy hush of the morning. It died away, slowly, slowly whilst all the while thy golden hair wrapped us round; and I awoke, with echoings lingering in my heart. Ah, what an ecstasy it brought! An ecstasy that was such exquisite pain that I knelt on my pallaisse in the dark and cold to pray *that* melody would never again ravish me. Is't not true love which brings such dreams?"

Jocelin breathed fast as one who had run far, and Rohese trembled at the passion throbbing in his words. Something stirred within her, new and strange, which she had never known before. What warm rush and tingle of delight was this which swept over her, at sound of this man's compelling voice? What sweet, soft languor stealing through every vein, as he clasped her hand and bent his appealing face so near that the breath from his beautiful parted lips trembled on her cheek like a caress? What witchery lay there in that all-conquering glance, which seemed drawing her very soul through her eyes to mingle with his?

"Rohese, Rohese," he cried, "lovest thou me?" But the maid still had will enough to try to draw away from

him; averting her flushed face, with a frightened "No, no, no!" But Jocelin did not loose his hold on her struggling hands, but turned them upward and kissed each soft pink palm, once, twice, with long soft kisses warm as sunshine. They thrilled her through and through, like a draught of some rare elixir.

"Thine eyes are filled with tears, Rohese, yet thou say'st 'No, no.' What lieth within thine eyes behind those tears? Thou darest not look me in the face! Say no again, sweet scarlet lips, for those glorious eyes declare thee darling traitors!" he murmured rapturously, triumphantly. His warm breath stirred the ringlets on her brow; his hot lips lay upon its cool whiteness like a flame.

"Thy lips, thy lips, sweet witch!" he cried hoarsely, "'Twere crime to force their virgin rose; yet by the twelve Evangels, they tempt me sorely! Thy lips, thou regent of my soul!" As a serpent holds a fluttering bird within its potent gaze, he held the frightened maid. His bright eyes wooing, wooing, seemed impelling her to yield. Just then a bell rang, clearly, softly, far within the palace; it seemed to break the spell. Rohese arose, pushing him from her with all her strength,

"Nay, nay," she cried with a look of terror, "a monk a monk; bethink thee, Jocelin, what hath a monk to do with love?" Jocelin paled, though he did not answer her, but stretched his arms to her pleadingly, tenderly, and advanced as if to fold her in their embrace. While she paused undecided, half inclined to fly, yet, glancing at him with veiled eyes which shone like stars, the corridor outside

resounded with a firm and heavy tread, and the deep tones of Abbot Samson sounded through the parlor:

"Let Jocelin await me in my bed chamber, Brother Walter, I'll to my ward within here, and then to rest. The hour grows late, and there is much to be written, so apprise him straightway. Good night, Our Lady's benison on thee."

Jocelin and Rohese started guiltily apart, and she pointed to a side door where he slowly withdrew with long, ardent, backward glances, and Rohese, her hands pressed upon her breast, went to the window and stood looking into the night with eyes which saw not, and bosom which rose and fell tumultuously. Yet when she had turned to salute the Abbot, and he commented on her flushed cheeks, she answered composedly, "Thy parlor is o'erwarm, Father, and in sooth, my head aches drearily. But thou hast other matters as I heard thee tell Brother Walter; I'll set my little mouthings by till morning. It was but of a visit from dame Bernice I came to speak."

"Thou art thoughtful like thy mother, girl, and I'll accept thy gentle little sacrifice, and hear thee on the morrow;" and with a blessing and a kiss upon her forehead, Samson dismissed her, and Rohese, guiltily thinking that *he must* feel that other kiss which so late had rested on her brow, fairly flew upward to the Gate-chamber, where Mistress Mary sat demurely by a taper, sewing a long white seam, as though *she* too had not just raced thither from the corridor outside the parlor, where she had, with palpitating delight, spied upon the monk's love making. But Rohese in her own confusion, noticed nothing, and

anxious to be alone, bade the girl haste to bring her night-rail and make her ready for bed. For a wonder, Mary made no comment on this early retiring, though she smiled knowingly to herself.

Rohese abed, the tirewoman withdrew and quiet and darkness reigned, save for the faint glow cast athwart the Gate-chamber by the coals glowing in their brazier.

CHAPTER XVII.

"Curl and cheek of thine stand there,
Bare the secret of thine ambergris locks is laid,
Abrogate are cross, and monkish gear.
Gabriel hath revealed the scriptures on the tablet of thy form."

ENTERING the Abbot's chamber, Jocelin found that he had exchanged his richly jewelled dress for a white serge robe such as novices wear, and reclined on his couch, with eyes filled with unutterable weariness, fixed upon space, as if trying to pierce the future. Beset by many other cares, this attempt of the Prince to seize the dower and person of Rohese, disquieted him much.

Though he had come into the high estate of Abbot inexperienced in governing, and little learned in the custom of courts had been set to preside over one, he had that within him, which, antagonistic to disorder and disobedience, overruled both. His early military training, and studious anchoretic life had strengthened and toughened every mental fibre, and he was one who by obeying had learned to to rule; who by self-restraint had learned to govern others. While within his stern, true heart he had a "Courage to quell the proudest; an honest pity to encourage the humblest." Within the Abbey, there had been debts and disorder to fight; without, rebellious subjects and wily Advocates who must be ruled with an iron, but velvet-gloved hand. The incoming of the one hundred and

fifty monks from Normandy infusing new life into the Abbey had greatly helped in its upbuilding, and in less than two years, every bond had been paid. Bailiffs, sockmen and townfolk raised their allotted portion of the Abbey's revenues; the repsilver came pouring in again in a small, but steady stream; and woebetide the false, remiss or unjust subject, for the new Abbot, though generally slow to anger, was terrible in rage, and many a discomfited vassal murmured, "He rages like a wolf;" until Samson, with grim humor, adopted the saying and adding the motto "*Sævit ut lupus*" to his arms, had it inscribed in letters of gold upon his standards.

The Abbot had gained another concession from the sulky Prince; and when Jocelin began writing, at his dictation, his first task was a letter to Ranulf de Glanville, Justicary in Chief; enclosing a mandate signed by John's unwilling hand, banishing the Jews from St. Edmundsbury, and pronouncing sentence of excommunication on all who should harbor them. The next letter was to my Lord of Clare, denying an unjust claim of fees for bearing the banner of St. Edmund in war; which Bigot had set forth while attending on the Abbot.

"Write, son Jocelin, 'Earl Roger, Bigot, asserts himself duly seized, and by such seizing holds this office from the time we fought the Flemmings ('Ehue, 'tis a weary while since then); also Thomas de Midham sayeth the right is his, so my Lord, when thou hast made out one with the other that the right is truly thine, come then and claim the fee, which shall be paid thee from the time of King Edmund's charter.'" So on, and on the Abbot dictated,

and the secretary wrote, far into the night. Letters to Pope's Legates, and King's Viscounts, ending with a lengthy epistle to the Archbishop of Canterbury, on certain weighty matters of Church and State. These duly sealed and laid in a sandal-wood cabinet, the Abbot closed his eyes and pressed his hand to his brow, as if the print of the miter was there, sighing wearily, as at his "Satis," Jocelin arose to set away the writing materials.

"Thou sighest, Dominie," said the secretary.

"Yea, is it a wonder? My son, thou and thy brethren share our plenty and prosperity; but little thinking of the giant task it was to bring things so; or the cares concerning the management of our house and family, and all the other business which harrows my troubled mind. Those three sleek leopards just gone are plotting usurpation, if I mistake not; and I travail sore for the safety of my ward, whose fair person hath awakened in them the lust of the body, whilst her dower hath kindled that more dangerous lust, the lust of gold. If it were so I could be present at court, I could hold them somewhat in check, but God wot what they'll now be hatching once my back is turned. Alas, my child, man never knows when he is blest, or realizes his happiness ere it is flown. Were I a monk again, with but five marcs in my pouch, I'd to the schools, or as keeper of the books, live at peace far happier than I am as Abbot and Lord."

"Who can believe such things, my Lord!" exclaimed Jocelin, but the Abbot smiled sadly, turning on his pillow, like one weary of the world, and as Jocelin extinguished the tapers and withdrew, he blessed him and gently bade him, "Goodnight."

"A good night!" Jocelin repeated to himself, as he went out into the dark. "Ah, Mary mother, will there ever be *good* nights for me again? By my troth, I hope there is naught writ amis in those letters; for I had but one word singing in mine ears the while I wrote — 'Rohese, Rohese,' and the feel of a soft warm hand resting in mine own; until I cracked my Lord's gold pen-staff by my tight holding. God's love! 'Twas Paradise! A man might easily risk all earth and heaven to rest his lips upon the dewy scarlet of her mouth! Christe Eleison! 'Tis a bitter thing to be such as I; shackled to the stake of mine accursed vows, and burned by Love's flames. Danger threatens my heart's anointed love, and I preforce, a coward, shaveling monk, must stand aside ignorant, unskilled and weak of arm, unable to lift even one sword, one single sword in her defense. It is not right! Am I not a man, with all a man's hopes, desires and capabilities? God is unjust, that men should live maimed, incapacitated things! Ah, Mary intercede for me! I blaspheme! Impious monk! Wouldst thou, like Job, curse God and die? Yet God made not monks — 'twas some devil's work. Christ and the Evangels walked free into the world, and Peter, when 'twas needed, drew a sword. I will not thus be buried like some mummied Pharo in his tomb. On the morrow I'll to the Abbot, and sue for release from this monkly servitude. Then I'll get me to my uncle in Normandy; (my father used to call it when he sighed — 'Sweet, sweet Normandy.') There I'll prove myself a man, and with my sword and monkly lore, carve a fortune out of Fate, and then — and then I'll return for my Rohese!"

Wandering through the maze of corridors leading from the Abbot's room, Jocelin all unwittingly turned into the narrow hallway which led to the Gate-chamber. Pondering on his fortunes, building castles in the air, all tenanted solely by Rohese and himself, Jocelin opened the door which Mary had forgotten to bar, and was astonished to find himself within the Gate-chamber. His first impulse was to leave at once, but an irresistible charm hovered around the place where Rohese spent her waking hours. It held him to the spot. The tapestry, stirred by some furtive draught, rustled softly on the moonlit wall, until it seemed imbued with life, and the white-clad figure of Helen of Troy 'broidered on the fabric, seemed leaning toward the Paris at her feet, as if she would embrace him. "I must be gone," the monk murmured, yet stayed. Ah, "Sometimes we are devils to ourselves, when we tempt the frailty of our powers, presuming on their changeful potency."

A subtile perfume hung about Rohese's carved oak chair. Jocelin knelt by its side, and buried his face in its cushions. "Rohese, Rohese," the very murmur of the dear name as it fell from his lips, filled him with an exquisite pleasure that was half pain. As he knelt there, he thought of her lying on her bed; all her glittering hair spread out — "Ah, sweet, like a golden net to catch men's souls in, whilst thou slumberest. Dear tyrant, have mercy; for thou hast my soul already fast. Oh blossom of my heart!" the monk cried brokenly, tears of love and longing stealing down his cheek, as he arose to tear himself from such a sweetly dangerous place.

Then he paused — "What if I only looked into her chamber to see if all is well? What harm can rise from just one look? Surely sin is in intention!" Jocelin gave conscience or reason no time to argue the point — softly, he crossed to the low doorway leading to Rohese's room, — and entered. A faint light from the brazier flooded the little chamber. A toilet table stood in the center of the room, the firelight glinting on the brass and silver furnishings. By its side a stool held, in a silken heap, Rohese's clothing. Jocelin touched it. It seemed as if the dainty garments were still warm from the contact with her sweet body. Quicker he moved now, more softly, his slender black-robed figure flitting through the shadowy room like some dark phantom of the night. It hovered for a moment round the curtained couch, and then it paused, and with trembling hand Jocelin drew the curtain. Rohese lay with her face turned toward him, her head half tilted backward, and her lips parted softly, and the red firelight played caressingly over her white neck and bosom; her glistening hair streaming all about her on the rich satin pillows, just as he had fancied it a moment since. One rounded limb was half disclosed, and lay white as marble against its rich dark background; the taper foot tinted to rose beneath; the oval nails like burnished ivory. Jocelin's heart stood still, and then gave a great bound, as if it would leap from his bosom. The hot blood rushed to his head; his breath came fast as he stood gazing; forgetful of everything save that one throbbing, panting, wild desire to have and hold that warm, white beauty; to crush it close to him; to drink in its sweetness, and never let it go! With a low, inarticu-

late cry he leaned forward and clasped Rohese in his arms, fastening his burning lips upon hers, and feasting on their dewy sweetness.

In the dark opening of the Gate-chamber a figure paused a moment, and the leering face and ferret eyes of Brother Walter peered in as some dire fiend would gaze upon a scene in Paradise. Then it disappeared quickly as it had come, like a dream flitting through a sleeper's brain. Jocelin, passion mad, bent his head to take further toll of his sweet prisoner's lips, as she awoke with a cry of terror which brought him to his senses. Then with one wild look of despair, and a faltered plea for pardon, Jocelin released her and fled from the room; on, on through corridor, down the stairway and outside Bradfield; through colonnades, up terraces, in the cold moonlight through dark vaulted halls until he reached his cell, where he fell upon his pallaisse, face downward, moaning in an agony of shame, and clutching at the straw.

The nocturnal bell sounded, but he did not heed its call. Later he rose, and slipped his robe from him, and the morning sunshine touched with pitying fingers of light his livid face, contorted in an agony of prayer, and his blood-streaked back and sides, as he knelt before his crucifix, crying "*Peccavimi! Peccavimi!*" wielding with unfaltering hand the blood-stained scourge.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"By our greatness!
Bitter torture shall winnow truth from falsehood."

ALAS for Jocelin! When that morrow dawned on which he had proposed to make such a valiant stroke for liberty, it found him exhausted by his vigil, and the cruel flagellation to which he had subjected himself, too languid to do aught save lie upon his straw, and follow the same round his mind had been traversing all the long, long night. What was his intent? What were his desires? What were Rohese's thoughts of so gross an insult? How would it all end? was what this poor self-accusing creature asked himself over and over. As to the latter question, he little recked how near was its answering; for Jocelin thought, as do all young and untried souls in Sorrow's shadow; when Anguish brings all her furies to scourge dying Hope and Joy, that this *present* woe could have no bitterer aftermath. But naught in this world is superlative, save death, and even *that* can hardly be called so, as there lies something beyond *it*. So while this wretched man asked himself, "What will be the result?" Brother Walter, early closeted with the Abbot, was bringing about a speedy ending.

Walter the Medicus was not wicked, yet his was one of those distorted natures in which curiosity, distrust and envy lurk like toads beneath a stone, only waiting the hand of opportunity to uncover them. Thus it was with the

firm consciousness of good faith he told the Abbot all he had suspected, and what he had seen in Rohese's chamber, though the fact that Jocelin was handsome, popular, skilled in the arts, and favored by the Abbot, may have colored the recital.

Samson heard him in silence; his firm jaw set like a trap of steel, but through his piercing eyes searched the informer's face, as if he would penetrate the shriveled soul of him, he could detect no deceit therein, and was forced to think what it tore his heart-strings to believe.

"It shall be sifted," said he at length, "thoroughly, and at once. Go bid the Prior assemble all the brethren in the Chapter-house, and straightway I'll come thither. Mind ye, I said *all;*" he repeated impressively, as Walter departed, his voice slightly trembling, for he could not *bear* to mention Jocelin's name; for him, Abbot Samson loved best of all his household, and often thought, "Had it been permitted that I should have a son, he would have been like this boy."

Left alone, the Abbot paced the parlor tugging at his grizzled beard, frowning and muttering as he moved, and after a few moments passed into his offeratory, where on his knees before the shrine, he prayed for guidance to do *firmly* and *justly* that which was to be done; especially pleading for power to restrain the anger and indignation surging in his heart against this untoward offender. Yet, however much the ermined of soul love those of meaner mould, they can never quite do them justice; for, living above the temptations with which they are beset, they are unable to sympathize with weakness.

Brother Walter was too wise to tell the Prior why the chapter was to be assembled, but that astute Norman drew his own conclusions from the eloquent face of the other, and shook his head dubiously as the monks filed into the chapter room, two hundred strong, and filled the long oaken benches on either side. Here they waited, chattering like school boys on the probable cause of the summons, but when the Abbot entered with Rohese, white and tremulous, and Mistress Mary (fresh from a stern interrogation) in floods of tears, expressive glances were exchanged, as if each would say to his fellow, "This smacks of some excitement, Brother!"

Seats were placed for the two maids near the Abbot's chair. The clerk of the chapter called the roll, each monk replying, "*Ad sum*," until all had answered to their names. Nay, not all — where is my Lord Abbot's own chaplain? And why looks my Lord so grim when Jocelin of Brakelond answers not unto his name?

"Bring him hither," said the Abbot. His tone made them start; 'twas like the menace of distant thunder and a hush fell over the assembly like that which presages a storm. Presently the messenger returned, followed by the delinquent. The moment he entered, Jocelin knew the worst had come; and with the last desperate courage of one who fights for his life against many foes, he drew his spare form erect and steadying his twitching features, came forward with calm, slow tread; *not* to his accustomed seat, but straight to the Abbot's chair, where, with a respectful obeisance, he folded his arms and stood, waiting for the accusation. Rohese crimsoned at sight of him, and

clutched her tirewoman by the hand; for Mary, aroused by her cry, had reached her side on yesternight in time to see the intruder flee across the Gate-chamber.

Darker, and darker grew the Abbot's face, until it seemed to the frightened monks that the room was filled with gloom, while in the suppressed tones of a man who fears to trust himself, he addressed them: "My children, it is in shame and anger that I reveal to you that deadly sin hath entered these hallowed walls, and a stain fallen on the honor of our house. Woe's me, I — and I have been the indirect cause, in that I nursed a viper in my bosom." (Pointing a shaking finger at Jocelin.)

"Before God and the saints, and this chapter here assembled, I, Samson, Abbot and Lord of St. Edmundsbury, by testimony of Walter de Medicus, and Mary, tirewoman to Rohese De Cokefeld, do accuse Jocelin of Brakelond, monk of the Benedictine Order, affirming that he is false to the letter of his vows, hath failed in obedience and chastity; hath at night, entered the chamber of our ward, Rohese De Cokefeld; that he was driven hence by her screams, and the arrival of her tirewoman."

The silence was unbroken; save, far back in the hall, an aged Norman whispered in his neighbor's ear, "Body of the saints, the penalty is *death* by living sepulcherture."

"What say'st thou, leacherous monk?" thundered the Abbot. "Betrayer of thy Lord's trust, renegade, would-be ravisher; wilt not thy master, Satan, put answer in thy mouth? Speak, I command thee!"

Jocelin cast a hunted look around, such as a drowning man would cast on the vanishing earth and sky. He

dared not glance at Rohese, but he met the Abbot's contemptuous look with one of mournful entreaty.

"My Lord," he answered, "I do confess that I went thither, but by the wounds of Christ, I swear I meditated no evil. I love the lady, my Lord, and passion overwhelmed reason. Indeed, I meant no harm."

At this weak defense, a low hiss went up from the chapter. The Abbot stilled it with a look.

"Is it *good*, wretched wight, to seize upon a helpless maid alone, half naked in her bed? Sideath, thou addest foolery to thy crime? Doth think to trick us with such a pouch mouthed whine? 'Indeed, I meant no evil!' We all were men, sirrah, before we e'er were monks: God wot! And prone to sin as sparks fly up. O spawn of evil, seek not thus to trick us with a puny tale no school brat would believe! Come, midnight prowler, hast thou no other safe defense than this?"

"I can say no more," answered the despairing monk, flinging up his arms wildly to Heaven, as if for justice there.

"Then, another can and shall. Walter de Medicus, stand forth!" So Walter stood forth and told his story, ending, by way of justification, "Indeed, methought them in the very lists of love, else would I ne'er have told the dread tale!" But he went no further, for Samson, with eyes aflame, struck him full in the mouth with clenched fist. "Remove him, shackled, to the tower;" and those nearest him right gladly obeyed.

"Foul bird which fouls its own fair nest," the Abbot thundered; "who dares insult a pure and virtuous maid —

deep wronged and shamed by this audacious break? Let me but sense such a thought in any man's mind, and by the saints, I'll flay him for to pluck it out. Thus doth sin breed sin, my sons. We'll fast till Ember day, and each do double penance to purge us from such vile contamination."

"Brethren of St. Edmund's holy shrine, I command ye each to rise as his name is called, and with prayerful consideration, answer ye. Is this Jocelin innocent or guilty?"

There was a pause, then the notes of a chant rose to the dim rafters of the chapter house, gaining strength and power, as each monk taking up the song, rose in place and stood ready to give verdict — "*Qui tollis peccate mundi miserere nobis!*" And as the last solemn note died away, the long roll was called and one hundred and ninety-nine voices answered, one after the other, "Guilty, my Lord!"

There was the sound of a fall, a cry from Mistress Mary, and the Abbot turned to see his ward in a limp heap on the floor; the maid exclaiming, 'She is dead, my sweet lady, she is dead!" 'Twas but a swoon, and when she had been borne to the cooler air of the antechamber, and ministered to, she lay, moaning, with her head on Mary's lap. An exclamation from the girl, who was eagerly listening to what went on in the chapter room, caused her to sit up, crying wildly, "What 'tis? Let me go, minion!"

"Ah, Holy Mother," cried the distracted maid, "'tis torture by the Rachentege till he confess his sinful intent; then punishment at the Abbot's pleasure. The cruel, cruel Lord — truly 'he rageth like a wolf.'"

"What, girl; what matter of thing is the Rachentege?"

"Wait, Madam, and I'll tell thee. List now, Brother

Tristian speaks;" and truly it was the tremulous voice of the old gardener who alone, of all the brethren, dared to speak a word for the renegade monk.

"Nay, I care not for him, wench! This Rachentege — it hath a fearful sound; describe it, I command thee!"

"Why, 'tis an engine which it taketh three to carry, (I've been told). 'Tis fastened to a beam, and hath a sharp iron which goeth round a man's throttle, so he can in no ways sit, lie or sleep but he beareth the weight of the iron."

Rohese drew a sobbing breath. "Mary," she demanded fiercely, "do'st believe that Jocelin came to the Gate chamber with evil intent?"

"Who can say, Madam?" answered the tirewoman. "But, as our Lord Abbot says, 'man is prone to sin!'"

But Rohese was not listening to this evasive answer. She was now intent on Brother Tristian, muttering as she strained her ears to catch every sound of his voice, "Jocelin loves me, and he, meant no evil. For my sake he will be tortured — for my sake, mayhap suffer death!"

Within the chapter room Tristian was entering a broken plea for mercy on account of the offender's youth, and his erstwhile devotion to the Abbot's service. "Bethink thee, Dominie, on thy return from thy mission to Rome, when thou wert gyved within the prison tower, the youth denied himself food, and risking punishment and broken bones, climbed the Abbey wall to succor *thee!*" They all expected the Abbot to break forth in invectives against this poor petitioner; but he answered kindly:—

"Rest thee, old frere. Thou dost well to remind us of such past benefits; a good deed, however small, deserves

rewarding. The decrees of the Abbot of St. Edmunds should not be variable; yet, because of this past kindness and because thou, in brotherly love, hath dared to succour the outcast, I will mix mercy with my just decree. Jocelin of Brakelond, fallen monk, brother of our household no more, when thou, by corrective torture, hath come to confess thy sin, I, Abbas Dominus, do waive the penalty of living sepulcherture which thy offense doth merit, and do sentence thee to life imprisonment in the Oubliette. We can punish the vile body, but God alone can deal with that evil spirit which hath so perverted it. May God have mercy on thy lost and ruined soul. Amen. Remove the prisoner."

At this sentence, groans rose from the lips of many, and as Jocelin was led away old Tristian, rending his garments and beating his breast, ran from the chapter room with tears raining down his cheeks, crying brokenly, "'Twas I who let the Devil loose in St. Edmunds. *Culpa* me, *culpa* me!" And the wondering monks exclaimed "This dreadful happening hath turned his old brain!"

While the Abbot made his severe indictment, Jocelin stood like a statue, alike indifferent to punishment or mercy, but when the stern voice ceased and he was being led away, he seemed to waken as if from a trance, and stretched tremulous hands to the grim judge, crying with a look of hunted fear, as he passed from sight, "Mercy, my Lord, mercy!"

'Twas then that a fair disheveled figure sped up the aisle, with tangled locks falling about a resolute young face; and Rohese knelt at the Abbot's feet, echoing her lover's wailing cry — "Mercy, my Lord, mercy! Father, I

will confess my fault. Torture him not, for Christ's sweet sake, for Jocelin came to me of mine own appointing."

Abbot Samson turned ashen, and he loosed Rohese's clinging arms, and stood looking down at her, disdain, fiery anger and sorrow struggling for mastery. Then his face hardened; his brow lowered. "Remove thee, woman!" he cried; but Rohese, laid her cheek against his silken shoe, and the Abbot pushing her from him with his foot, unheeding poor Mary's frantic shrieks of "It is not true, Lord Abbot; let me speak!" cried, "Remove the lehman," and strode from the hall.

CHAPTER XIX.

"Wizards know their time —
Deep night, dark night —
The silent of the night;
The time when screech owls cry,
And ban-dogs howl."

'Twas the close of a dreary windswept day; winter had now set in; for two weeks Rohese had been locked fast in the Gate-chamber. The Abbot had not seen her, since the day of Jocelin's trial. It seemed as if he waited for time to cool his wrath before he decided how he should punish her who had proved his favorite's undoing. So Rohese passed her imprisonment as best she might, longing, yet dreading for the hour to come when she should be summoned before the Abbot for his final decision. Mistress Mary had been sent back to De Cokefeld, weeping and protesting, with the rest of her lady's attendants. A surly, black browed monk brought Rohese her scanty fare, and save for his daily coming, she had been utterly alone. At first she had wept continually; more for Jocelin than for herself, but gradually the full horror of her position dawned upon her. In the chapter room on that fateful morning seeking to save the wretched monk from torture, she had told the kindly lie, in the purity of her heart little thinking of its full import. But with many hours of lonely reflection, she had begun to ponder on the look of horror the monks' faces had worn, and the white rage and anguish depicted on the Abbot's countenance. Now she

began to perceive that in the eyes of all she stood confessed a guilty thing, whose seductions had wooed a poor monk to his ruin. The trial was before her waking and sleeping, until in her torture she prayed for some cord within her weary brain to break, that loss of sanity might blot out all remembrance of what had transpired.

As she sat hopelessly in the twilight, her face buried in her hands, the key turned in its massive lock, and her keeper entered. Usually surly and silent, he cleared his throat once or twice, as if to attract her attention, and as she glanced up in surprise, it seemed as if he looked at her significantly as he set down the wine and loaf which formed her daily sustenance. When he had gone, pushing them impatiently aside to rest her arms on the table, a look of surprise came over her face, and she lifted the loaf. Surely it was heavier than was its wont! On breaking it, a key and folded bit of parchment fell to the table. Rohese carried the parchment to the window, and read with straining eyes these words:

"Wilt now believe the witch's prophecies, maid? I warned thee, but thou heeded not. If thou wouldst save the monk from his dark prison, and thyself from the clutches of the Prioress Rosamund, for Samson will send thee thither, (she hath claws like a cat, God wot), let thyself out after the nocturnal bell rings, (this key unlocks all doors). Get thee to Bradfield gate; unbar it, (and haste thee, for ere cockcrow thou must be away to De Cokefeld); once outside, follow the Abbey wall through the forest, (if thy heart fail thee not), till thou hast gone full half the distance to the prison tower. Wait thou there."

This was signed with a curious black mark as if a sooty thumb had been pressed upon the page.

"'Tis from dame Bernice!" Rohese joyfully exclaimed. "Saved, saved, poor Jocelin from his dreary prison, and I, (ah, thank the holy saints), from almost as ill an one," and she shuddered as she thought of the cruel look the Prioress had given her. Amid her rejoicing, Rohese did not think of the perils and difficulties of her undertaking, but straightway supped heartily, and almost gaily prepared for her dark and dangerous journey. Night had fallen, and she was allowed no lights, but she easily sought and selected the few jewels and treasures she desired, and though there were some hours to wait, she donned a dark hooded mantle, and sat with what patience she could muster until after the nocturnal bell had rung, and she heard the monks, attendant on the Abbot's household, go pattering down the stone passage to the chapel, and then back again to their cells.

When all seemed securely quiet, Rohese unlocked her door and slipped cautiously into the long corridor; the door of which the witch's key also opened. It moved easily as if on greased hinges, and though a watch was set nightly all through Bradfield house, strange to say, the place seemed deserted as some ancient ruin. Quickly she passed to the great hall door. Here she paused, feeling doubtfully of the key. Surely 'twas far too small for that great lock! But on trying it she found, (as the witch had written), it opened all doors; — for the heavy lock turned with a gentle click, and Rohese found herself speeding across the icy courtyard. The gatekeeper snored peacefully before

the glowing brazier in his little lodge; the heavy bars of the gate swung back without a sound, and when she had turned and pushed it shut again, Rohese was outside the Abbey walls. Along the lonely way she ran, the far-off stars blinking coldly on her through the mist; the night wind touching her cheek with chill fingers, and the hazel coppice through which she passed casting weird shadows on her path, seeming to stretch gaunt hands to stay her. Rohese felt as if she were shut alone in some great black chamber, where gibbering, hideous phantoms crowded near. On, on she sped, terror lending swiftness to her feet. An owl shrieked from the wood like a tortured thing, and the cold sweat rose on her brow. Half way to the tower she stopped. Her breath came in gasps, and shivering with fright and cold, she leaned against the Abbey wall. All was darkness and silence, save for the occasional rustle of some branch stirred by the wind. Over her head a great hawk flew heavily and slowly, sounding his warning cry as he flew, and Rohese, knowing that up there in the wide night sky a soul was passing out somewhere into the void, crossed herself and murmured a prayer.

Just then a dark figure seemed to spring up from the ground at her side, and the shriek of terror which rose to her lips was silenced by a hand clapped roughly over her mouth.

"Milk-liver, wouldst draw the whole monkly pack howling at our heels?" and the erie face of the witch of Ely peered closely into her own. "Old Gooseberry hath stood us well tonight, though, odds-bodkins, why should I so torment my aching bones for two young flibberjibbits?

Well, hist thee now! I've done all I can or will. What yet remains to do thy young heart must dare, for by Grimalkin's eyes, though I'll sport on murky nights about the graves, and pluck the shrieking man-drake in the dark, I'd venture not where thou must walk tonight. The way itself is dread, and then, mayhap the tortured dead lurk there, who gnawed the living flesh from off their bones whilst starving in the Oubliette. None save I know it, so if thou 'scapest the gulf and ghosts, thou'lt find thee safe at last where thy monkly lover languishes."

Rohese answered her in a firm voice, "Show me but the way, dame, and though I cross over dead men's bones, I'll follow it, for I fear not." And all the courage of her race was up in arms to quell her womanly fears.

"Well spoken! Thou hast thy grandsire's spirit, maid. I like thee well, my little wench, and dare say thou'lt find a way to draw the monk forth. Look ye now," and digging away the turf from near a boulder, the witch lifted an iron ring with her staff, and disclosed a narrow opening in the ground.

"Wind this rope about thy waist; put this flask within thy bosom, for it will aid the monk's escape. Pass down these steps; then pause, count thy paces carefully as thou leavest them, for if thou takest one half step too much there'll be no maiden heir to De Cokefeld. Count fifteen steps, then pause; press thyself close against the right hand wall ere thou takest one more, and moving slowly, pass through the darkness with great care. Best say thy prayers, for if thou movest to the left one-quarter inch thou'lt fall into a gulf none e'er hath fathomed. When thou hast at

last turned corner thou'rt safe, if no dread phantom rises on thy path. Move swiftly onward until a wall obstructs thee. Lift up thy arm its full length; run thy hand along its ledge, where shouldst find a bar; slide it back, and thou canst pass into the cell where thy monk lies in the Oubliette. Once thou hast got him out, and left the secret way, close and cover it securely, then haste thee straight to De Cokefeld; provide thyself with a chosen few, and thence to thy sea-girt tower in Norfolk. There set sail for Normandy, where thy father's cousin, Edmund dwelleth in his strong fortress at Gaillon. If thou wish not the young monk's company, send him to me at Ely, where for his mother's sake, who one time served me, I'll aid him. Haste thee now. Farewell. Be brave, for all depends on thee. Prosper thy quest."

And the witch disappeared as suddenly as she had come. Left alone, Rohese did not pause, but with wild beating heart, entered the opening and descended the damp broken steps. On the last she paused, then stepped down, and counting her paces carefully, reached the wall. Pressing herself close to it, she found herself on an inclined path very narrow and slippery ever leading upward through the darkness. After some moments, she turned a corner, and reassured by the fact that she had passed the dangerous gulf, soon found the bar in the wall, and with difficulty moving its rusty length backward, a portion of the wall slid gratingly aside, and Rohese passed into a cell dimly lit by the wan light of the early dawn coming through a grated window set high up in the wall. She was in the cell of the Oubliette, and going to the center of the room, where

a low stone curbing ran round a black well in the floor, she leaned over and called, "Jocelin, O Jocelin! Jocelin, 'tis Rohese calls thee!" Far down beneath her a thin, faint voice cried out in surprise and joy one single word — "Rohese!" and she knew the poor monk still lived in the depths of the Oubliette.

CHAPTER XX.

"Thou stretchest down thine arms of snow
To lift him from below."

ROHESE looked about her for an object to which to fasten her rope. The cell was entirely bare, save for a heap of faggots in one corner. The window was too high and far from the pit to admit of using its bars; time was fleeting; should her escape and the attempted rescue be discovered, her punishment would be sure, and she had no doubt Jocelin's life would pay the forfeit. Rohese did not think of him now as a monk, a man, or a lover, but as a creature who, for her sake, had been condemned and left to perish by slow degrees in the Oubliette. She must not waste precious time in accomplishing her purpose, she told herself feverishly, as she felt that strength and courage which had buoyed her up through her journey faltering. So, womanlike, in her darkest hour of doubt, she leaned over the Oubliette to encourage the man whose life and liberty depended upon her strength and determination.

"Jocelin," she cried, "I have come to save thee." The monk answered her but faintly; worn with torture of mind and soul, emaciated by confinement and semi-starvation, (for very meagre were the portions let down to him by his jailers); his dry tongue could scarcely articulate, and his dull brain scarcely conceive the intelligence that there was still hope for him; a forlorn hope, 'tis true, but when woman wars with unfavorable circumstances, there seems to come upon her an added sense, an instinctive perception of the

thing needful. Rohese fastened her rope to the witch's wicker-covered flask, and lowering, said, "See, here is wine — drink and gain strength and courage, my poor friend."

Jocelin obeyed; Rohese heard the distant "gug-gug" of the rare Chianti as the parched mouth drank and drank, as though it would never get its fill. It was but a few seconds when Jocelin spoke, in a tone very unlike his first hoarse whisper. The wine had stimulated him and he was himself again.

"God's benison on thee!" he cried. "Take my grateful thanks for coming thus, like an angel to solace the last hours of so tortured, lost and damned a creature. I know not how thou found'st the way, sweet, but I see in this a token of forgiveness, or my body would have rotted, and my soul beat itself free from its wrecked cage, alone and uncheered by such divine mercy and forgiveness.

"I thank thee, Rohese, I thank thee! Fare thee well! Depart now from that dreary cell; the stones are cold unto thy tender feet; and thou, if found here, would suffer for this deed of charity. Fare thee well, light of my life. I can die now in peace. Since *thou* hast forgiven me much, perhaps God can also. I loved thee well, Rohese — to my undoing, but if a broken and contrite heart, and bruised, weary flesh can gain Supreme forgiveness, surely my poor soul may yet attain some lowest spot in Heaven, where, after years of waiting, it shall bloom in gladness to see thee enter into the golden glory of the saints. *Ora pro me*, Rohese, farewell!"

The voice faltered, then died away. Rohese's eyes were

filled with tears; yet she dared not give away to the emotion which swayed her.

"Nay, Jocelin, not farewell, for I have with me means of thy liberty. Arise — prove thyself a man; though weak and weary, shake off this lethargy. Our Lady hath answered my prayers; I was shown a secret way hither, and now in but one little moment, Jocelin, this rope — stout fastened to — to — some nearby thing, an' by my troth, I'll straightway draw thee forth."

"Nay lady, thy strength of body commensurateth not with thy heart. Stand back — I would but pull thee into this dread place, destroying that which I hold dear above sweet Heaven itself."

Rohese was at her wit's end; well she knew, that unaided, she could not lift the weight of Jocelin's body, and if she did not find some way to raise him, and that speedily, from the dungeon, his stimulated strength would fail, and she would have to leave him to his fate. But how fasten the rope? She searched the cell in vain. Then, as she gazed with a despairing prayer upward, her young eyes pierced the gloom, and she saw suspended from the intersected groins over the Oubliette, a great hook, (used, no doubt, in former times by those who descended into the pit to see if their victims still suffered). But how could she reach it? And if the rope were let from thence how could the monk, weak and with untrained muscles, ever hope to climb it? Then an exclamation broke from her; her woman's wit had solved the problem. Quickly she seized the sturdy fagots, and began tying them, at short distances apart, along the rope. When they were

all distributed thus, and she had tested each knot, she ran to the window, rope in hand, and after much scrambling up the rough stone wall finally reached the ledge. Here, she was many feet nearer the hook, for the ceiling was mercifully low, this being the topmost cell in the tower. After many fruitless efforts, she finally succeeded in casting the noosed end of the rope over the hook, and when she had descended to the floor, she pulled it tight, and clapped her bruised hands in glee when it drew taut and held fast.

"Now," she cried, "now Jocelin, take courage," and she let down this strangely improvised ladder.

"Nay, 'tis useless," said the monk. "Depart, I beg of thee, as I have not the strength to come up, if I had the will. An outcast renegade, with a price on his head; an object of scornful pity, let me die in peace here, since thy coming hath so comforted me."

Rohese set her teeth hard and clenched her hands. What was she to do? It was already day, as the growing brightness outside showed?

"Jocelin," she cried, "Jocelin, wilt break my heart and desolate my life? Come to me! I am frightened in the dark and cold," and what with excitement and the despair in her heart, she began to sob, crying, "Ah, thou lovest me not, and care not if I die."

Jocelin sprang to his feet, for at that cry all the manhood in him rose. She whom he loved called him to her side. Pain racked him, and weakness oppressed, but he called to her strongly — "Weep not, Rohese, for I come. Steady thou the rope;" and Rohese, with tears still flowing,

threw all her young strength upon the rope and held to it as a drowning mariner clutches a spar. Well for Jocelin of Brakelond that no convent-bred maid stood there in that supreme hour. Her muscles trained and strengthened by her hardy life at De Cokefeld, stood Rohese in good stead, and steadily she held the rope while Jocelin slowly, painfully, with hoarse labored breath, drew himself up fagot after fagot. He was half way up when Rohese's strained ear caught the beat of sandaled feet upon the stones far below. She knew they were coming to see if all was well with the prisoner. If Jocelin became conscious of this impending danger, the shock might cause him to loosen his hold.

"Hurry thee, hurry thee, Jocelin," she urged; and to herself she prayed — "Time O God! Give us but time to reach the passage." Dame Bernice had said that none knew of the secret passage from the tower, and Rohese felt that they would be safe if once behind the turning stone.

"I come, beloved, I come," said Jocelin; but Rohese could tell by his voice that he grew weaker. The fact that he was in the Oubliette kept him from hearing the approach. "Time, O time!" Rohese pleaded with Heaven, and, "Haste, thee, Jocelin, oh for Christ's sake, haste thee."

Now they were at the prison door; now they had paused, and she could hear the faint sound of their voices; then the jingle of keys. Her arms ached; her head reeled. It seemed as if she must loosen her hold on the rope and fall fainting into the pit. Jocelin had paused for breath.

"I can come but slowly, Rohese," he panted. "I grow fainter as I climb." It seemed to Rohese as if she had

stood there for hours. "Haste," she cried mechanically, straining her ears to catch every sound. They must have the tower door opened by now! Ah, thank God, it seemed to hold; they could not open it, and tried other keys.

"Up now, Jocelin of Brakelond, for Mary's sweet sake! For the love thou bearest me! Up, man, up!" Jocelin clambered on, too spent to answer. He was nearing the top. Rohese could hear another key inserted in the rusty lock. Two, three more fagots! How far apart they seemed to watcher and climber. Now Rohese heard the door creak on its rusty hinges; now they were on the stairs.

"Merciful saints, give us time. Haste, O haste! my friend!" Thanks to Fate, O anxious ones! it is the slow feet of old Tristian who, with Richard of Hennan, climbs the winding stair. Lucky chance which made old Tristian pause for breath on the landing, despite Richard's surly "Come." Two, one fagot more. The footsteps sounded in the little entry outside.

"Give me strength, Ah, Heaven!" cried Rohese, and as Jocelin reached wearily for the last fagot, she leaned forward, and bracing herself well against the curb she lifted him bodily out of it, just as the monks paused at the door. As the lock turned with a rusty clang, she dragged the half-unconscious man across the floor, and pressing hard against the turning stone, dropped it behind her, and stood in the dark black passage with Jocelin at her feet. Then as she drew breath, she heard the cell door open, and the loud exclamations of the entering monks.

CHAPTER XXI.

"Safe, safe at last!"

It was some moments ere Jocelin could stand, and by this time the monks within the cell, having satisfied themselves that the Oubliette was empty, had departed to bear the news to the Abbot; Richard exclaiming, "The Devil hath spirited away his own," and Tristian following him, mumbling thankfully, "It is the Holy Saints who have rescued him." Wonderful to relate, the Abbot received this startling intelligence with equanimity. "Ye have done well to inform me so readily, my sons," be calmly replied; and they departed wondering, to rehearse the tale in the Chapter room. In his heart, Samson was glad of Jocelin's escape, ascribing it to some sympathizer among the brethren, who gaining access to the prison keys, had spirited the condemned monk away. Despite his anger at the sin, the Abbot loved the sinner, and since Rohese's declaration, regarded the monk's indiscretion more leniently. "Truly, I rejoice," he said to himself as he went forth to join the Abbey Advocates, whom he had assembled to discuss his plan of confining his wantonly inclined ward in the nearby Priory, that she might be under the corrective influence of the Prioress Rosamund.

"Yea, 'twas ever thus," he muttered angrily, tugging at his beard. "Since the days of Eden 'The woman tempted me, and I ate.' By my silver cross, e'en *I* was deceived by the fair young wanton, until she spoke out brazenly before them all, without a falter, when even my rough old cheek

burned with the shame of it. "'Twas at my bidding he came!' By the Saints! Hereafter no woman shall enter this Abbey, be she old and ugly as Sin, or young and fair as Purity. I'll so order it at next chapter."

While the Abbot went toward the audience hall, and Tristian and Richard spread the wonderful news, Jocelin, and Rohese had come safely across the narrow path and emerged into the light; pausing a moment in silent horror to gaze back on such part of the perilous way as the morning light revealed. Then, they hurriedly closed the entrance, concealing it as best they might, and hastened into the copse, and so—on, into the heart of the wood, toward De Cokefeld.

As Rohese's jailer did not visit the Gate-chamber till evening, they would have almost a day's start of the monks, and by keeping off the highway, at a safe distance in the wood, Rohese thought they might reach her castle by day-break the next morning.

They differed much from those gallantly equipped travelers who had ridden so gaily to Bradfield that bright autumn day, some weeks before. Now they moved furtively and painfully beneath the bare branches of the sombre trees; their clothing torn by the icey twigs of bushes and brambles; and poor Jocelin, whose sandals had grown rotten in the damp air of the Oubliette, now fulfilled the dream, so passionately related in the Abbot's parlor, for he literally followed her over a briar-strewn, rocky way, with torn and bleeding feet. On and on they pressed. Now a hare would skurry across their path. Once a red fox flashed before them like a flame; here and there the

glossy green and red of the holly bush, or the silvery gleam of the mistletoe from some gnarled oak-bough, brightened the dim wood. The day had dawned dull and cold, and a chilling wind wailed through the trees, rattling the boughs above them, and piercing them through with its icy breath. The monk and maid spoke little, for both were sorely tried by the rapid pace at which they had come. When they had walked for some hours, Jocelin began to lag, and finally sank down upon a bank, calling weakly, "Dear Rohese, stay a while, for I can go no further."

Rohese turned, and scanning him closely for the first time, was startled by his white cheeks and dark-circled eyes. Her heart misgave her. Could this poor creature make the long journey to De Cokefeld? Or must she go on alone, leaving his body to lie in the wood, uncoffined, unwatched save by the vultures? She turned hurriedly, and knelt by her companion's side, supporting his head on her lap, covering him as best she might with the folds of her gown and cloak; though her heart was too heavy for many words of cheer, as even her strong young frame was failing under the sustained strain. But she wiped away the tears which *would* rise to her eyes, as she gazed into Jocelin's pinched face, and tried to say cheerfully:—

"Rest thee, my friend. Why, I am hardly weary yet. Fie man, by my christendom, 'tis but a pleasant morning walk. Thou art a poor suitor to tire so soon of such goodly company."

"Alas, sweet lady! At my best I were but a poor fellow. And now I bid fair never to reach even the highway. Go on, my dear deliverer. Why tarry over so useless a hulk as lies stranded here?"

Rohese laid her hand on his lips to silence him, for she knew that if she spoke she would burst into tears. Yet, within her heart she was disgusted that this man whom she had surrounded with a halo of romance, should show himself so weak. Conversant with bravery and chivalry, she felt that Jocelin fell far below her standard, and the emot on which had stirred her when he wooed so masterfully now flickered, paled and died out in the light of stern reality. The dream had departed. The shadow of love reflected in her waiting heart had flown, leaving in its stead pity — a pity perilously akin to contempt.

Looking anxiously about for a place of concealment, Rohese's face suddenly lightened.

"Jocelin, come but a few steps farther." And when he had risen, she half led him down the bank on which they had been resting. As they descended, they seemed suddenly to enter a warm room, so great was the change of the temperature. They had come into a deep little dell, well screened by bushes and carpeted with fallen leaves. Here the chill wind could not reach them, and they felt quite safe from notice. Warmed, and comforted by this assurance, the two weary fugitives were soon asleep. They had not slumbered long when Rohese, being the less weary of the two, and thus the lighter sleeper, awoke with a start, for above them she heard the undergrowth rustle as if someone was passing. So secure did she feel she was about to close her eyes again when a cry of terror arose to her lips. Over the rim of the dell was thrust a shaggy head and rough muzzle, and the blood-shot eyes of a great stag-hound glared down upon them; then the dog withdrew

and sent a prolonged bay echoing through the woods like a clarion call. Rohese clasped her hands and bent her head in prayer. Jocelin, awakened by the sound, sprang staggering to his feet, and seizing a broken bough, placed himself in front of Rohese. She, though confident that the monks were upon them, could scarce restrain a smile at Jocelin's appearance. A cadaverous, trembling figure, bare of foot, clad in torn black garments, brandishing in his weak hand the piece of rotten wood. Then they heard a voice calling the hound. To one of the fugitives at least, this voice was familiar, for Rohese sprang up the side of the dell with a glad cry, and cast her arms about the neck of Bernice of Ely, pressing warm lips to her wrinkled cheek, much to that good dame's disgust.

"By Satan's horns, wilt strangle me, thou bramble! Let go, wench. Save thy kisses for thy lover; old Bernice wants them not." Yet despite her rough repulse, dame Bernice looked up into the girl's face with a not unkindly gleam in her eyes. Rohese, used to her brusqueness, was not disconcerted.

"Thank Heaven, Mother, thou hast traced us, for my poor companion will not be able to get to De Cokefeld," and in truth Jocelin now leaned against the bank nearly fainting.

"Poof, who said the monk was to go to De Cokefeld? I'll have no phillandering, wench, I tell thee. However, the wight needs food and drink, and we must hasten, for thy flight has been discovered, and the monks are buzzing like a hive of bees."

Rohese would fain have questioned the dame, but she

shoved a small venison pasty which she produced from a sort of wallet she wore into the girl's hand, and taking a flask of wine from the same receptacle, carried another pasty to Jocelin, and stood over him until he had eaten and drunk to her satisfaction. Then she whistled to the dog, which came bounding up. Upon his back was fastened a bundle, and his mistress said to him approvingly, as with many groans she knelt to unbuckle it, "Good Dunstan, thou hast carried well!" Dunstan wagged his tail to show his appreciation of this compliment, and relieved of his burden, departed in search of smaller game than that he had just discovered. Selecting several articles from the bundle, dame Bernice turned toward Jocelin, and half led, half pushed him into the dell, saying to Rohese, as she disappeared after him, "Turn" thyself into a serving maid, whilst I make a woman of the monk — no hard task by Hecate!"

By aid of the articles left in the bundle, Rohese, with ready wit, soon transformed herself into a buxom woman, who from her garments might be some well-to-do Franklin's daughter, but who, with dark face half hidden beneath wimple and veil and russet braids (the witch's toilet box had been complete), looked little like the lithe and blonde lady of De Cokefeld. Up from the dell now came the witch, followed by a slender figure somewhat stooped, and clad in the sombre robes of a widow, with face well muffled by a black veil. Rohese's spirits had risen, and she sprang to this figure's side, saying, "I salute thee, Madam, for I think me I am thy tirewoman. Set thy coiff more erect, I beg, my lady!"

"Dost think I'll pass notice, Rohese?" Jocelin asked.

"It seems as if I would burst asunder these woman's trappings at every step. Dame, dame, thou hast me so tight incased I can scarcely breathe."

Rohese laughed — "Nay, Lady, thou must suffer for thy looks' sake!" Here dame Bernice broke in impatiently:

"Come, come; there is no time for foolery. We must be on our way to Ely. There is another private way thither known to me, but 'tis too long and tedious for thee. Then too, I go by the highway that ye shall be seen. A man will pass by a jewel on his own dunghill, but spy it in the most unlikely place. We'll bide at Ely tonight; thou my niece, Margaret Gregory, and thy tirewoman. Now up, onward to the road. Thou, niece Gregory, lean upon thy maid's arm; thy widowhood sets heavily on thee, poor soul!"

And admonishing them with her staff, the witch set off, continuing as they followed, "Later in the day we'll come upon Will, my Lord Bishop's fagot-cutter, who, by the Abbot's permission, cuts spicy billets for his master's hearth. And, if I mistake not, we'll drive into Ely at nightfall, instead of riding poor Shank's mare,"

Then the strangely assorted party moved onward with the great dog in their wake, now running far ahead to bark at some imaginary enemy, now circling round them as if to assure himself that his charges were safe; and so, without pausing, until they were on the high road, where in a few moments they came upon a cart laden with fagots, driven by a rosy-cheeked fellow in a leathern smock whom dame Bernice hailed as Will O'Ouse, demanding conveyance for herself and companions.

"Nay, Dame," answered the man civilly enough, but evidently much afraid of her; "seest thou not the cart carryeth a goodly load of fagots for the Bishop?"

"Cast out some, if there be not room," said the witch coolly. "Dost remember how Robin lost a wheel from his cart when it grazed my garden wall? Or how Jock's brat coughed up bits of stone, could not say the sacred name, and when it spoke Satan cried, 'This bites, but it maketh me speak it right well.' 'Twas 'cause his dame lent me not the earthen bowl I craved. Bah, churl! 'Twere ill done to risk broken bones, or a spavined horse for a surly 'No' to weary travel-baited women. Let my niece and her tirewoman mount thy cart, and I will walk beside so thou'lt get to Ely a good hour earlier than usual."

Will, quaking at the witch's implied threats, and relieved that she herself did not propose mounting behind him, gave reluctant consent, and Rohese and Jocelin climbing into the cart, sat upon the fagots, while the witch, good as her word, set off at a brisk pace, with Dunstan following at her side. And, strange to say, the horse, though mending his gait, seemed to have much to do to keep up with this extraordinary old woman. Ere they had come to Ely, snow was falling; and when they had crossed the bridge and reached the town at twilight, the houses loomed black 'neath their peaked coverings of snow, and as they entered the quiet dusky streets, the lofty lantern in the great octagonal tower of the church gleamed forth like a kindly beacon to light them on their way.

CHAPTER XXII.

"Follow her, follow her;
Follow her home."

THE woodman's cart rattled over the stones of Ely, past the church, round the corner, and drew up at a great iron gateway, over which was a shield carved in the stone, with three crowns summounted by a miter — the arms of Ely's Bishopric.

"Here I must enter," said Will, "so Mistress thou hadst best descend with thy tirewoman." Jocelin and Rohese descended, she thanking the man courteously, and he shame-facedly made them a sort of clownish bow as they moved off after the witch, who was fast disappearing in the snowy distance. Down the dark street they hurried, catching glimpses, through snow-wreathed lattices, of families grouped around their blazing hearths; then past an Inn, whence three worthy burghers issued homeward, after a merry hour in the Inn kitchen over a pot of foaming mead. They greeted the travelers roughly, but kindly, though one, (a boisterous wight), proposed that they kiss the wenches ere they let them pass; but his more prudent companions restrained him, and the monk and maid passed unmolested. As they walked, the houses were fewer and farther apart, and at last they turned from the one long street, on which the principal part of Ely lay, into a winding lane following the river.

After making many turnings, Bernice suddenly dis-

appeared over the river bank, calling them to follow, and to mind the bank, for it was both slippery and steep. So cautiously they descended almost half way to the water, where Bernice entered a long, narrow door, and by the time the two stepped over the threshold, she had raked the embers together on the hearth, throwing on fagots until the room was soon bright and warm.

When the door was fast shut on the snowy darkness, dame Bernice said to Jocelin, "Now, sir monk, off with thy widow's garb, for here thou art safe. But thou, maid, hadst best retain thy swarthy skin, though thy dark locks will come away with thy coiff. Now sit thee here and warm, whilst I see what manner of provinder the witch's cupboard contains. Wouldst like eft's eyes, newt's sides, or will the marrow of a fat young snake appease thy hunger?"

She went chuckling to a corner cupboard, leaving the girl to look wonderingly about her. The low, heavy-raftered room was hung with bunches of herbs and bones, (the latter, the townsfolk whispered, dug by the witch from the churchyard on dark and stormy nights, though they looked more like the bones of animals than those of human beings). Along one side of the room ran a rude shelf, where were piled flasks, platters and pannikins, one or two great wood covered books, secured with brass, fastenings, and an alembic, (the witch dabbled in alchemy as well as sorcery); along with many other strange objects unfamiliar to Rohese.

Jocelin, divested of female attire, sat on a low stool before the fire, his face shaded by his hand, looking mournfully into the flames. He was like a ship-wrecked man,

who, having lost all save life in the angry waves, had been thrown, destitute, on a foreign shore. What was he to do? His world was in chaos. Rohese could flee to De Cokefeld, where she would find friends and safety. What work — what place was there in the world for a renegade monk?

Dame Bernice, busied with her cooking, bustled to and fro, mumbling to a great black cat which followed her, purring, about the room. Finally, Rohese broke the silence.

"Jocelin, dost take thy freedom so ill? Thy sighs tread upon one another like tumultuary choir boys in a Processional. Why so downcast?"

"I was but wondering, Lady, where in all this fair England I could find a livelihood. I am too old for a page; too sad for a minstrel; untrained for an Esquireship. I cannot attach myself to any school, or join the friars, for soon the Church in all the realm will know my wretched story."

Rohese flushed, paled, and with a half sob, covered her face with her hands. His words pierced her like a sword, for too well she knew how infamously her own name would appear in that story. Jocelin ignorant of what had saved him from torture, wondered at her emotion, and after much questioning, drew from her the story of her self-disgrace. He sat still for a moment as one stunned by a blow; then he knelt at her feet, and kissed her garment's hem. Bending there with the fitful firelight on his wan cheek, his eyes fixed on the tear-stained face above him, like some travel-worn pilgrim adoring at the shrine of a

saint. Rohese motioning him to rise, he stood looking down on her with the light of a solemn resolve in his dark eyes.

"Rohese, why hast thou done this thing for one for whom torture was all too fair an end? 'Greater love hath none,' the gospels read, 'than he who giveth life for another.' A woman's fair name is more than life to her, and thou, sweet saint, hast offered thine up in all innocence and goodness. It hath not been in vain, Rohese, for though I'll not accept thy sacrifice, the knowledge of it has given me a work to do; an aim in life for such a time as my poor life shall endure. I'll to the Abbot to deny thy sweet, untruthful words, and he, in that I've given up my life to so attest thine innocence, will know its truth, and right thee with the world. For thy forgiveness and aid, I can never thank thee, dear, but whether I go to the rack, or back to the Oubliette from which thy bravery rescued me, Rohese, my love, my tears, my prayers are all for thee — farewell!" and turning away, Jocelin had stepped toward the door, when he was confronted by the menacing form of dame Bernice.

"Hoity, toity; miowl and spew! What 'tis thou pratest of, cell-bredling? Thou'lt move no step hence to-night. Look at thy garb; the snow falleth heavily, and in it 'twere impossible to retrace thy steps to Bradfield over the long, dark way. What good will thy frozen body do in vindication of maid's honor? By Hecate, fool, I'll spring upon thy back and stick fast there like a burr, if thou attemptest to move one step. Nay, try if thou likest. Try thou to open the door of Bernice of Ely," and she laid a skinny

hand upon the oaken slab. "Thou'lt do more than locksmith or blacksmith could e'er compass," and sure enough the door, though seemingly but latched, held fast, despite all Jocelin's efforts to open it. So he gave up all idea of returning to the Abbey that night; though steadily refusing to resign his purpose of seeking the Abbot on the morrow.

Even when Rohese entreated him to go with her to De Cokefeld, and thence to Normandy, he remained firm, and the witch signed her to cease her importunities. They presently sat down to a supper of savory broth and oaten cakes. When this was ended, dame Bernice partially filled a goblet with wine for Rohese. When she had finished drinking, the beldame went back to her cupboard for more, lingering somewhat over the filling of the cup. This she handed Jocelin, who, when he had drunk about half; set it beside him on the table, saying:—

"By my troth, Mother, thy wine biteth. I can drink no more."

"Faugh! Thou hath monkish taste, indeed, if thou canst not stomach my rare green Contar. *Rohese* complained not."

"Nay, it seemed most mild and good to my tasting." So Jocelin finished his portion, and the witch carried the cup away with the supper things. Then she brought out her distaff and drew close to the hearth, with Jocelin on one side upon a long settle, and Rohese at her knee, on the stool the monk had vacated. Dame Bernice croned a weird song as she twirled her distaff, and the wind wailing over the great chimney played accompaniment:

"When the moon is hid,
And the fog looms dim,
And the night rack black hangs low;
Through the murky dark,
Whilst the ban-dogs bark,
To the dank church yard we go,
Ho! Ho!
To the dank church yard we go.

"There, with Hecate's brood,
We will spill the blood,
Midst the shades among the tombs;
Whilst the phantoms troop,
In a ghastly group,
And the brazen rhomb low booms;
Ho! Ho!
And the brazen rhomb low booms.

"Then the graves split wide,
And from every side,
The rottening corpses gleam; —
And the fires of Hell,
Light our banquet well,
Till night fades like a dream,
Ho! Ho!
Till night fades like a dream."

As the last strain died away, Rohese shuddered and turned to speak to Jocelin, but he lay on the settle in a deep sleep, and the witch following her glance, said grimly:

"Aye, he's but a weakling. Thou art not for him, girl. A *man* will some day hold thy woman's heart. I'll finish me this turning, and then we'll to bed," and despite Rohese's questionings, she would not speak again. So they sat in silence; the monk slept; the beldame twirled her distaff, while at her feet Dunstan and the cat dozed side by side; and Rohese, with her head on her hands, gazed into the fire trying to read her future in the glowing, crumbling fagots, while outside the wind howled and piled the snow high about the house.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"Betrayed — captived."

"Here's one to speak with you."

In the gray twilight of the dawning Rohese was awakened by the witch, who, as they breakfasted hurriedly, explained her plans for the journey to De Cokefeld.

"The ice on the river will not bear yet, and I'd not have the monks finally trace thee from my door; wishing to keep my skin uncooked for the next fifty years o' life — Asmodeus hath promised me; so, as thou canst not take horse this side the Ouse, thou must pass o'er it by the witch's ferry. Come now, for one must ride early on my ferry if he would 'scape a crowd of open-mouthed lubbers. When safely across, knock at the first hut in the wood, saying, 'I come for my horse,' and one will be furnished thee. Recross the stream some miles lower down (thou'lt find a roadway leading to the ford from the hut); then make straight for the highway. Turn in the first lane thou comest to — thou'lt recognize it; 'tis the short way to De Cokefeld. Tarry not; speak to none; ride fast, and before even thou'lt be safe in thy stronghold."

Refusing thanks for her timely aid, dame Bernice assisted Rohese to resume her disguise, and, wrapped warmly, she followed the dame out into the white stillness of the winter's morning. The town behind them was not yet astir. Only here and there a faint wreath of smoke curled up from the tall chimneys. The thin coating of ice over the

river glistened like a silver sheath, and the snow was piled high along the banks, weighing down every shrub and tree. 'Twas a fair scene. The silent town silhouetted against the whiteness; the lonely, snow-covered hut in the foreground; the quaint figure of the witch plodding sturdily along before the tall, dark draped girl. Almost at the water's edge stood a sturdy gnarled tree. Rohese noted curiously that two stout ropes stretched from its branches across the river to another tree, situated nearly opposite. As they paused beneath this tree, she saw high up in the branches a great basket, such as laundresses use for their linen. To her wonder and consternation, dame Bernice directed her to climb the tree, and pushing the basket out upon the rope, to enter it. Rohese protested affrightedly.

"Nay, nay, dame. I feared not the dark passage to the tower, but by my troth, I'll not venture life and limb on that mid air cockle shell."

"Odds heartlings, wench! Then thou canst bide till thy ghostly jailers come for thee. For they are on their way hither. Whilst thou slept I summoned my familiar, though little enough I learned thereby, for he was as full of sullenness as a sulling ox. But the Abbot, remembering thou spokest once of me, and the Advocates knowing my nearness to thy house, hath dispatched the Prior and others hither to find thee, or to force me to reveal what I know of thy disappearance!"

So, Rohese having no further choice, climbed to the basket and finally succeeded in scrambling therein, her perturbed face peering piteously over the rim at the

witch, who stood below grinning sardonically up at her.

"Within the basket is a knife. Cut thou the rope when thou art over; and convey the basket to the hut, for I would put my ferry out of sight."

"But, mother, how can I get over the stream, mewed up in this basket?"

"Bah! How thou grumblest at naught, idle pate! Seest thou not a second cord fastened to the basket rim? Pull on it, wench, and get thee gone!"

Rohese gave a faint hearted pull, and the basket moved a few inches along the rope on which it was slung. The witch lost patience, and broke into a fierce string of invectives, ending with, "Aye, aye, little addlepate; hang thou there then like ripe fruit till the monks come and cut thee down. I've other business than to be cooling my heels here," and she gave an angry hop and a skip and was out of sight.

Rohese, so deserted, had no alternative but to go forward, so she crouched in the basket and pulled at the rope; thus propelling herself slowly across the stream some nine feet above it. She closed her eyes tightly, too frightened to look at anything, and tears of nervous fear trickled 'neath the shut lids; but as she pulled away she bethought her of Jocelin. Her mind thus diverted from herself to the unfortunate monk, she wondered where in that small hut the witch could hide him from their pursuers; for she never doubted the truth of her informant's statement. So conjecturing on another's danger, her own was past. For with a final jerk the basket hung within reach of the tree, and she swung herself into it and descended to the ground

in safety. First, as bade, cutting the ropes, which were jerked across the river by the witch, who had reappeared, and nimbly climbed up the tree and down again ere Rohese could walk away toward the wood; where, following a slight path trodden in the snow, she soon came to a small hut similar to dame Bernice's. Here, at her knock, a black browed churl appeared, and in answer to her words, silently led a horse from round the house, and as silently retreated into his cabin, slamming the door behind him.

Rohese once on horseback, followed the path to the ford. The sun rose and shone brightly through the avenues of trees. The air was bracingly cold, the palfrey a good one; and Rohese felt hope spring anew within her. She passed the ford safely, cantered onto the highroad, making good progress despite the snow, and after two hours' ride turned into the narrow lane mentioned by the witch. On she rode, light-heartedly murmuring snatches of a roundelay, for youth is irrepressible, and the cares and troubles of the past weeks seemed to roll from her shoulders on this bright winter day.

Around a corner where the lane took a sharp turning, she came full upon a monk and four nuns, whose approach had been concealed by the muffling snow and the noise of her own horse. Rohese drove her heel into his flank to urge him past the cavalcade. But the foremost rider, a veiled woman, barred her way, and demanded in a peremptory voice, "Whither goest thou, wench? For by thy attire, thou art not gentle."

"I came from Bury, madam," Rohese mumbled.

"Uncivil jade! I asked thee not that. Wither goest

thou? Lift thy veil when addressing thy superiors. Comest thou from Bury, and knowest not the Prioress Rosamund?"

Alas for Rohese! Had she come thus near to safety to at last fall into the hands she had tried so hard to evade? She shook her head, mumbling some incoherent words asking benison, and pleading urgent haste, and again tried to press on. But the Prioress kept her jennet across the path, and the monk and other nuns drew closely about her at a glance from their superior, who had now unveiled her triumphant face. Then with deft hand she snatched off Rohese's veil, with the coiff and false ringlets, and threw them upon the snow, laughing as the bright locks came tumbling down about her stained face.

"'Tis no use, Lady," she said sneeringly, "though we missed thee at De Cokefeld, I've found thee at last. See," showing a parchment sealed with the Abbey seal, "the Abbot orders thee to become my guest; so ride with us, I pray thee, to our poor convent," and then drawing nearer, and speaking too low for the others to hear, she continued insolently, "King's loves can afford to be particular, thou yellow headed fool (God wot my locks were far more golden, I vow. Henry called them his sunshine once as we sat under the oak at Woodstock); so fall thou in behind the sisters and follow us to the convent. I'll ride not with a monk's lehman. Why didst not pick the Abbot if thou must play the harlot before thy dead mother's milk hast dried upon thy lips? Fall behind; I am no stomacher of dalliance, as thou wilt find!"

With these bitter taunts, the Prioress passed the wretched

girl, and led her cavalcade back toward Bury, beyond which her Priory lay, and Rohese, covering her head as best she might, followed the staring nuns in utter despair, while the monk, a burly clownish fellow, rode close behind her, as if to guard against any attempted escape.

While Rohese rode sorrowfully in the wake of her captor, Jocelin awoke from the long sleep caused by the witch's drugged wine, to find himself alone in a tiny chamber, seemingly without egress; bare save for the truckle-bed on which he lay, and a rude, three legged stool, whereon a lighted wick flickered faintly in a small earthen bowl of oil. The cell was so small that Jocelin, in rising, struck his head smartly against the ceiling, which as if by force of the blow, was lifted, and the wrinkled face of dame Bernice peered in on him.

"Climb forth, youngster," said she, "but first quench the lamp; 'twere a sin to waste good oil. Odds heartlings! 'Twas a happy chance which timed thy waking so, for hadst thou cracked thy crown so loudly against my flooring an hour agone, the Prior and thy brethren would have harried thee out like a raton. Indeed, that Norman Prior is like a ferret."

Jocelin, clambering from the cell, found that he had been in a sort of cellar where the witch had placed him, once Rohese was away (for, like most old women, she loved a comely youth, and Jocelin's mother had once done her a good deed; so she was determined to keep him from the clutches of the monks).

"Did they seek me, mother?" asked he.

"Nay, 'twas rarer game. Thou, they told me wert

translated bodily from the Oubliette; some said to Heaven, others to Hell. 'Twas the maid they sought."

"Ah, Mary Mother! Did they carry her away then?" cried the monk, looking about the room in vain for any sign of Rohese."

"Fool," exclaimed the dame contemptuously, "thinkest Bernice of Ely is to be caught napping? *All* old women are not tabbies, boy! The maid is away and safely nearing De Cokefeld ere this time."

"And what hour is it, dame?"

"Well, thee slept long, for 'tis bordering on eventide. Thou wilt not have time to reach Bury tonight, if thou art still cracked brained enough to return where thou art as those dead, whose faults are covered in the tomb and forgotten. 'In the grave there is no remembrance!' Ehue, will a witch sleep there as soundly, thinketh thou?"

Jocelin having no comfort to offer one whom the Church had taught him to regard as doubly damned, made her no answer, replying instead to her *implied* question —

"Yea, dame, I go back to the Abbey. 'Tis the least one can do who hath sullied the whiteness of a maid's name to wash it clean with his blood."

"Dark will soon come down, my son," said the witch kindly. "Bide with me again tonight, for a few hours make no difference, now the maid is safe, and on the morrow I'll set thee on thy way."

Footsteps crunched on the snow outside the hut. "Hide thee 'hind yon curtain; some village wife comes, no doubt. Yea, though they fear and hate the witch, they must needs run to her, be it blood in kine's milk or fits in the weanling.

By the step, it is the widow Margot, mother of simple Tom. No doubt he hath been at some poukerie again. These simpletons are surely begot of Satan."

Widow Margot entered; stout, panting and rosy,—a woman of some forty years. She was decently dressed, as became the widow of a well-to-do Franklin, with rather comely features, though somewhat vacant of glance and expression.

"Lawks sake, now good dame Bernice! How fares it with thee this bitter day? The wind from the river cutteth one's chops as a cheese whittle."

"Well enough, widow," answered the witch stolidly, "what brings thee out, then, in this chill river wind?"

"Why now, crummer," said the widow propitiatingly, "I said to my son Tom, 'Now there sitteth poor dame Bernice all mewed in by the snow; mayhap she wanteth. 'Twere a kindly deed to carry her a pat of butter and some of this rare wastle-cake thy cousin Anne sent us but yesternoon. An' Tom,' sayest I, ''twill not come amiss if I carry thither this missive;' which but this day came from London town, brought hither by a messenger in scarlet and gold, who flung it at our door with a pack of my brother Peter's motleys, (thou knowest Peter is Prince John's jester, dame), and by my troth, all he spake was, 'From the Chamberlain of the palace, for the widow Margot;' then spurred he away like mad, ere one could question him. 'Mary, save us, Tom,' sayeth I, 'perchance the goody will read it us, for 'tis well known that she readeth like a monk. By our Lady,' say I —'' but dame Bernice stopped her—

"Aye, 'tis a favor they ask. Yet, thank thee for the

food; there's naught in the cupboard save a crust. Come thou back on the morrow and I'll give thee the prescript of the scroll."

After faintly protesting this mandate, and relating such news and gossip as she knew, the discomfited Margot was forced to depart, leaving her gift and the precious letter in the clutches of the witch; her curiosity unsatisfied, and her fears for the safety of the mysterious missive greatly augmented by the precision with which the grim old woman locked it from sight in an iron bound oaken chest.

"There must have been nuptials at Anne's Grange." Dame Bernice sniffed the spicy cake approvingly, and she commented to Jocelin, who, the visitor safely out of sight, had come forth again. "Wastle-cake is not so common as it was in King Henry's time. Aye, hard to get the better yet. Draw up to fire, Jocelin, the night lowers chill. 'Tis well Rohese is safe at home, for methinketh if the widow's gossip be true, the lisping Hawthorn bud of a lord who with slight attendance rode through Ely this morning is none other than the bastard, Geoffrey Clifford, on his way to visit his mother, the Prioress. Odds heartlings! say I Lady Prioress! She's no more fitted for Prioress than Grimalkin yonder. The Favorite seeketh the crosses in his mother's pouch, methinketh, more than the crosses on her Priory."

Hating the insolent courtier as one fears and hates a loathsome reptile, Jocelin set his teeth hard at thought of Geoffrey's leering glances at Rohese, and muttered thickly as he stared before him in the fast gathering twilight.

"An' by the Queen of Heaven, 'twere not a sin to rid earth of such carrion carcasses as his. Had one a good sword, 'twere a joy to prick him through his golden 'broidered doublet (where the heart lieth in any other man). In fair fight, I mean — openly!"

"Heaven forgive me," he thought, as he stretched one thin tremulous hand to the blaze, "that I, so near just punishment an' slow, but certain death, think aught of taking the life of another!" and he bid his beads while dame Bernice glancing furtively at him from across the shadowy room, murmured:

"Losh! I powdered the poor monk's draught too heavily, methinks. His wits wander."

CHAPTER XXIV.

"I am a bastard begot
In everything, illegitimate."

THE metallic red of the afterglow fired the west behind the gaunt black trees, and cast a stain over the snowy road leading to Rosamund's Priory, until it seemed to the cold and cursing horseman, who had impatiently pushed far ahead of his retinue, that the way was blotched with blood; and he half reined his steed, shamefacedly crossing himself as his horse set foot on the red streaks, and then cursed the deeper for his superstitious fears. His furred robe and cloak of ruby velvet, gold prick spurs, and gaily caparisoned steed showed him to be a man of high rank; and the twelve soldiers who now came cantering up to him wore the colors of the Prince's household. This fact would have indicated to any passerby that the traveler was a courtier; and, indeed, as he turned his fur-bonneted head to the soldiers to petulantly order greater haste, the horseman disclosed the countenance of Geoffrey De Clifford.

John was absent from London, and the Favorite, under the displeasure of his royal brother, had been left behind, much to his satisfaction; for Geoffrey had pressing personal business that necessitated an early visit to his mother, and he eagerly seized upon this opportunity to make the journey. He had counted on completing his business and being again on the road to London long ere

nightfall; intending to spend the night at Bradfield; but he had tarried o'erlong over the Bishop's wine cups at Ely, (having gone thither to ascertain his mother's whereabouts, as she had a colony of nuns established in Oxfordshire, and was sometimes there). Then, too, the snow had retarded progress, and here, at evening, Geoffrey found himself still several miles from the Priory, with men and horses tired out from the long, tedious journey, for they had come over an unbroken road, and had been forced to plough through the drifts. But impatience never shortened any road, and it helped the Favorite no whit now; he and his men being forced to plod along as best they might until the afterglow had faded, when they saw the snow-crowned towers and battlements of the Priory, and were soon dismounting in its courtyard.

Geoffrey arrived but a few hours after Rohese had been locked in a high, remote chamber, and the Prioress, somewhat disconcerted and disturbed by the proud silence of her young prisoner, was not in the best of humor to hear the appeal which he had come to make.

The rich dark dress of the courtier was accentuated by the bare grey stone walls of the Hospitlem, which, though it did duty as a guest room, was hardly furnished save for a heavy bench or two, a Missal stand, a painted St. Boniface on the wall, and a round iron brazier, wherein flickered a sea-coal fire.

The Prioress had laid aside her cloak and stood in the light of the tapers set on the Missal stand, a severe stiff figure in her white serge tunic, and linen headdress. She frowned upon Geoffrey like some forbidding

ghost arisen from the shadows lurking in the corners of the dimly lit room.

Geoffrey felt the coldness of her glance, and his smooth flow of pretty phrases was agitated by it, and broken into short choppy waves of words, like a pond ruffled by the wind. Ere he had finished his tale his mother broke in:

"'Give, give,' crieth the horseleach! and is never satisfied. Ungrateful, have I not stripped more than one shrine for thy profligate spending? Thinkest thou I can go on forever recasting the records? The Abbot will some day discover the falsities, and then 'twill be disgrace and banishment to Acre for my Lady Prioress; and what — for her Princeling?"

"Nay, Mother, thou art overwrought. Something on thy journey displeased thee. Didst say thou went to Bradfield?"

"I said not whither I went; nor needest thou know, presumptuous boy. Am I, whom a King once obeyed, and a realm served, to be cross-questioned by such as thou, sirrah?"

"Mary's bosom, sweet Mum, thou art unjust and cruel to thy King's son. I meant no questioning, believe me! Lovest thou me not at all, Primrose mother?" and the wily Geoffrey, balked in his attempt at discovering the purpose of his mother's late journey, covered his defeat by an adroit movement to his reprover's side, and wound his stout arm about her with endearing words, soothing her impatience and placating her ire.

"Ah, thou hast thy father's way, Love; thou art far more fitted for England's throne than the forked thing which

sits thereon. Methinketh Elinor must oft gird her teeth at night, contrasting her mandrake of a boy and thee, my bonny Prince!"

"Little doubt of it, sweetest madam. But my answer; what sayest thou, Lady Prioress; can not these waxen fingers pluck a few pence from thine household's goodly purse for an unworthy wight?"

When Rosamund, in a mollified tone, asked — "An' what sum wisheth this naughty, pestering popinjay? This maid-seeking, pleasure hunting votarie?" Geoffrey named a sum so large that it caused her to start from his encircling arms.

"What! What! Why, 'tis full half of all the income of our revenues, wretched boy! By my christendom, thou ravest!"

"'Tis well then, madam, that thy son be branded through the courts of this realm and France as a preading coward and thief? I lost the sum to Louis of France at dice!"

"And shall the coffers of this holy house be robbed to pay a shameless gamester's debts? Sideath! Get thee back to thy dissolute companions and borrow thou of them, or of thy darling brother! I'll raise no cross of the sum."

"Then, woman, if thou wilt have the tale in verity, the sum must be forthcoming by twelfth-night, or by the saints, I'll find me in some loathsome dungeon to rot there until they take me out to butcher off my head. John left a jewel casket unlocked, and I, being in sore need, (by Jesu, he should not have placed temptation in a needy wretch's way!), I — O, well — Nay, mother, look not on me with

such terrible eyes! I but *borrowed* his jeweled belt pendant, that I might raise money thereon from Benedict, the Jew, knowing full well that thou, dear patient mother, wouldst reimburse the heathen dog, and then I'll put the bauble back. John's away in the north, and will not miss it until he returns, some two or three weeks hence."

"Miserable wretch!" murmured Rosamund, beating her breast, "A thief, a thief, my son a thief."

"Well, what was my mother?" retorted Geoffrey brutally. "God's eyes, am I to have the chink or not?"

The wretched mother did not resent his insult, but continued to smite her breast, saying, "*Paccavimi!* I do but deserve it. 'That which we sow in corruption shall we reap in corruption!' Aye, aye, I'll find a way to raise the sum," she responded to her son, who was scowling at her. "I'll raise thee the sum, my son, never fear."

Geoffrey's face cleared. 'Twas as if some hand had wiped an ugly picture from a tablet, and limned a fair one in its stead. His debonair smile came back, his eyes sparkled, as he exclaimed gaily:

"By our Lady, Mummy dear, squeeze thou an extra penny out — add fifty more for thy scapegrace, mother dear, I pray thee!"

"Yea, I'll give thee fifty, more," said Rosamund bitterly, "As I have given thee all that I was— I am, or ever hope to be — as I gave thee life and nourishment when first thou camest into the world, and thou'lt suck me dry, and then go and seek another nurse. Thy father took my best and brightest days, then dashed me in this dusty corner here to die of mold and mildew, or just *exist* within the cloister

gloom, as some poor leek grows blanched within a cellar. God's love! Are women all so repaid for loving faithfulness? Does love bring naught but punishment and pain?

"Come, come, thou king's brat; we'll go over the doubly falsed books again and see if by some hook or crook we'll pay thee not safe out of thy thievery!"

And the two left the guest room; the mother white and silent, with compressed lips, and aching heart; the son protesting, flattering, cajoling, with all the assurance of a pander and a practiced lickspit. Geoffrey de Clifford was but what birth and training had made him. Rosamund, with her cold, capable brain, recognized this only too well, but her mother's heart bled and anguished over this ripened fruit of her guilty love.

Rohese, in her windswept prison, pressed her white face against the iron barred casement, and gazed out into the snowy darkness, toward Ely, and wondered whether Jocelin and dame Bernice knew of her plight, and if they would try to rescue her. But she sighed, to think it improbable that the witch could again send a key which would release her. And no doubt, ere this, poor Jocelin knelt again in the blackness of his Oubliette, praying for death to end his suffering.

"Alone, alone," cried the girl, "doomed to weary imprisonment, in the power of a very fiend, methinks. Even were I the guilty wretch she calls me, surely her calling and her sex should teach her to be kind to one in shame and sorrow! Ah, Heaven seems so far off! Thou holy saints, wilt thou not intercede for me? Thank Jesu, when the doors of earth are shut, the doors of Heaven still stand

open wide — *Ave Maria.*" And Rohese, weeping, fell upon her knees beside her bed to pray. Gradually her limbs relaxed, and she sank against the couch. Heaven had taken pity on her, and sent its gentle messenger — sleep — to heal her bruised heart.

She dreamed Henry of Leicester had risen from his grave to champion her cause; and that she leaned upon his arm, a happy bride, while the organ pealed through the Abbey church, the Abbot blessed them from its high altar and Jocelin, with face uplifted, radiant, played. And as the mellow chords thrilled forth, through a painted window the sunshine streamed across the tesselated floor, and in its beams, two bright and glorious angels smiled upon them.

Far away another sleeper tossed on his couch within a hut by the river side; and an aged woman, trying to assuage his burning fever, murmured charms and self-reproach in the same breath. 'Twas dame Bernice who chanted over Jocelin.

"I confide in the efficacy of this excellent book, which expels the fierce wolf, through fascination, and disablement, which muzzles the mouth of the burning spirit of the entrails. Aroint thee, spirit of fire, from these gentle veins! Las me, las me, I drugged the poor wight too deep. 'Twas kindly meant, I trow! But now, poor Jocelin, blazing fever holds thee in fiery talons. Aroint thee, thou fire-fiend, I say!"

CHAPTER XXV.

"The King's jester, thou henceforth
Shall wear the bells and scalloped cape."

CLOSELY, carefully did the mother and son study the Priory accounts far into the night; but few pickings were left for these vultures, who had for years so systematically preyed upon the poor convent, that at most, all the Prioress could promise Geoffrey was but a small part of the needed sum.

The tapers burnt low in the Prioress' parlor; the wind swept erily about the battlements and towers of the lonely place, as mother and son stared at each other with despairing eyes. Geoffrey sank down upon a chair and laid his head upon the table where the records lay.

"All is lost then, by Jesu! I feel the ax upon my neck. John will never forgive me, and that devil dog Jew forced me to sign a bond ere he would deliver me the gold I got for the pendant."

"Thou wert a fool to be so tricked!" said Rosamund tartly. Her hand trembled as it plucked at her quivering mouth. She was thinking, thinking, as only a desperate woman can; turning this way and that in the darkness of her despair, for a ray of hope. She could not borrow on the utensils of the Priory, as they (in fulfillment of the rule under which it had been established) were few in number, and of silver instead of gold, save the candlesticks and ewers which were of brass and iron.

"Holy Saints! Thou art saved, my son! The maid Rohese has been consigned by the Abbot to my charge." Geoffrey glanced up indifferently.

"I see naught in that, save an order of punishment for a haughty wench whom by my halidame I should like well to humble!"

"Thou shalt! Thou shalt, my bonny boy! She refused thy suit and aspersed thy mother's name. Now she shall be glad to bear the bastard's name. 'Tis said she burned for a monk. We'll quench her fire with a right royal cavalier, by Jesu! And she shall have a lady Prioress for granddam to the bastard's child. By fair means or by foul, she shall. The wench is *here*, and by Henry's love for me, my son, if she'll wed or no, I'll give her thee for thine own. Her coffers are stuffed fat with gold; and her lands will bring thee in a princely revenue. On the morrow I will urge my Prince's suit. To bed, to bed, dear one, and dream thou of the golden gain and golden girl thou shalt enjoy, for though it irks me to the core, I can but say she is fair." And the two locked up the records and retired, rejoicing that they had found so easy a solving of their troublesome problem.

But early on the morrow came a messenger summoning Geoffrey to John's bedside in his castle at Northumberland; where he lay ill of a frequent recurring ailment caused by gluttony, which later compassed his death.

There was naught for it but to go. Geoffrey persuaded his mother to journey with him a part of the way, and then take her course to London, where, by intercessions and threats, she was to endeavor to regain the jewel from

Benedict, by promising a far larger sum than the Favorite had received; to be paid on his marriage with the Lady De Cokefeld.

So poor Rosamund, a martyr to her maternal love, made ready, attended by Brother Simon and one nun, and set out at once, for there was no time for dillydallying with reluctant brides. The Favorite's precarious position was at stake; perchance even now some officious courtier was already creeping into favor by his ministrations to the royal invalid; and Geoffrey bade farewell to his faithful mother, as she turned off into the London highway, and rode northward in a very bad humor; abusing and cursing his attendants till he was in much danger of getting a whittle stuck through him from behind.

Some days later, Jocelin awoke from a long, deep sleep; weak, but with mind restored.

During the time in which Jocelin was convalescing from the effects of the witch's drugs, dame Margot came daily to the hut, demanding her letter; but her loud clamoring brought forth naught save a glimpse of the grim face of the witch frowning on her from the narrow latticed casement, and not once could all her demands, entreaties or tears induce the inflexible dame to open the door one inch, or reveal aught of the contents of the missive. Truth to tell, Bernice had mislaid it among the many odds and ends her great chest contained; and had neither time nor inclination to search for it whilst Jocelin was ill. Now that he grew better, she ascribed his speedy convalescence to her powerful charms and invocations, far more than to (what

was no doubt the real cause) her constant administering of such herbs as were known to her rude science.

One morning, a fortnight after Rohese's departure, Jocelin sat making himself a pair of sandals for the journey back to the Abbey, for his illness had left unchanged his determination to return thither. Bernice sat near by nodding over her distaff. Suddenly her swaying head became fixed; her body grew rigid, and the distaff dropped from her hand with a clatter which attracted Jocelin's attention, and caused him to rush to her side. She sat ashen and motionless, gazing into space, with her thin lips drawn tight over her toothless gums. 'Twas a horrid sight. In vain did he chafe her hands, and lay away the folds of her gown from round her skinny throat. He crossed the room for water, and as he turned again to the old woman's side, her body relaxed; she sank together on her seat, a crouching mumbling heap.

"Woe, woe — Rohese, Rohese!" For some time she repeated these words, seemingly unconscious of her surroundings, but finally she cried excitedly to Jocelin —

"She's in the toils, wight! They have her fast. A vision, a vision, by Hecate! I heard that she-wolf say unto her cub, (they stood by written books outspread upon a desk), 'Think on the golden gain and golden girl thou shalt enjoy! I have her safe!" Hadst thou not lain so low, my son, I'd learned of this long ere now. Now perchance it is too late; and she is in some loathsome den in London town! Ah, why were witches born with hearts? I dare not try the circle of the rhomb again. Asmodeus fierce did threaten me, as I risked it thrice. No magic, black or

white, can now avail. Thou must to London town in search of her."

"Thou didst but dream, dame! Pray God thou didst but dream!" cried Jocelin. Ere she could answer him a great clamor arose outside. It was widow Margot and simple Tom, who pounded loud and called —

"Josha, old dame! If thou'lt not bring the letter forth we'll to the Bishop with complaint." Dame Bernice sprang to her feet.

"Aye, there'll I find where Geoffrey is, and with him I doubt not we'll find the maid. I'll to the Bishop's," and donning her cap and cloak, she grasped her staff and was out upon the astonished pair in a trice.

"What — how now? Gossip Margot and witty Tom? Beshrew me if it ain't!" she exclaimed with effusive welcome. "The letter? Ah, 'tis bad, bad doings, dame. I go now to the Bishop's seneschal (a worldly wise wight, who's lived up London way) to ask him what he thinketh best to do. No, I'll tell thee no whit of it till I speak with him. And vex not thyself that I opened not my door to thee this long while, for mine own familiar hath for some days been biding here. Soft — wouldst like to spy him? Peep through the casement, then Margot, see where he sits him by the fire. But make no sound, for if his glance but fall on thee, by paddock, thou wilt change into a toad."

Fear and curiosity racked widow Margot. She longed to see what all the village talked of with bated breath; for on winter nights when the wind shrilled high, many a dame would say, "Aye, there's the witch of Ely's fiend a calling her." The widow shuddered at the danger of the

thing; yet felt that the honor of Ely was, in a way, at stake. So, to show herself brave and to satisfy her curiosity, she took one frightened peep. What she did get was a glimpse of Jocelin bidding his beads, inside the dusky room, but she sprang back with a cry.

"Mary Mother! He all but spied me. O dame, forgive whate'er I've said to cross thee o' late! Thou shalt have an oaten cake each week, good dame, by my christendom!"

"Mother, Mother, let Tom spy!" said the simpleton pulling at her dress like a child, his great round, beardless face and prominent blue eyes wide with terror.

"Nay, saints forbid, my son. 'Twas the fiend himself; a great black man in a cowl, forging an iron chain, blowing sparks upon it with his breath, and fanning it with his hairy tail; Jesu! I saw his cloven foot beneath his monk's gown! Fare thee well, Goody, I'm off for our Lady's chapel to say a rosary there. If thou'lt honor my poor house upon the morrow, and bring the missive thither, I'll promise thee a bowl of smoking broth, and such a pie of reeking mince as thou ne'er saw afore."

The witch, well satisfied with her stratagem, amiably agreed to go; resolving privately to find the letter that very night; and she hastened away to the Bishop's palace to find the seneschal, a gnarled, cross-grained old fellow, who had once been a varlet up London way, and to whom the townsfolk had given the names of "Miser" and "Warlock," the former from his stinginess, and the latter from the fact that he and dame Bernice were old cronies, and had many a crack together in her hut, or in his office, a little chamber far down in the south wing of the Episcopal residence.

When she had found him, dame Bernice was not long in worming out of him all he had overheard in the Palace concerning Geoffrey and his mother. They had left the Priory with a nun and priest, and had ridden in great haste, toward London. When she was convinced that this was all he knew, the witch departed and was soon home again, where she found Jocelin pacing the floor in helpless agitation.

"The two are gone, but I could learn no whit of Rohese, though no doubt she rode with them dressed as a nun. They're hatching some devil scheme, beshrew me, if they're not! Sit thee down and calm thee now. Cackling ne'er laid an egg, and ye must do like some tailless ratton, whilst I plan the doing o' it. I'll dig within this catch-it-all of mine to see if I can find the widow's letter she so prateth of; or else she'll have the Bishop round our ears."

Bernice, after much turning over the chest's contents, produced the letter and began to read. As she read, her grim old face brightened, till, with a sigh of relief, she finished it and coming to Jocelin's side and clapping him on the shoulder, said:

"Aha, my bucco! The way is shown! Fate hath not clipped short old Bernice's good days! Canst strum a lute?"

"Aye," answered Jocelin wonderingly.

"Knowest thou songs, wight? Canst turn a jest or play on words?"

"I know somewhat of minstrelsy, Dame, and in the old peaceful days, before my madness wrecked my life, 'twas

said I had a ready wit and agile tongue. But, las me! all that is passed away with innocence and happiness."

"Well, then, it shall return again with folly's bells and nonsense to keep it company. For thou shalt don a fool's garb, and play the part of fool, (which thou hast so lately *practised*), at John's court."

"Why, Dame, what would such as I do there in Cockney-town among the rich and gay of a court?"

"Make 'em laugh, thou fool; or weep, odd bodkins, it mattereth not which, so long as thou keepest thy eyes and ears wide ope, and find the whereabouts of the maid. Hist thou! This missive from the Prince's chamberlain reads thus:

"'"Unto the Widow Margot, Greeting: Thy brother, with his latest breath, did entreat me to give unto thy son his jester's garb, his bells and hood; in fact, his place in court; saying he was a rare fool; indeed, knows many a song and old-wife tale, and is as loony mad as any one could wish a ninny to be. In short, dame, thy brother Petros lieth a corpse, and with this packet of his garb I bid thy son come unto his Highness' court to take his uncle's station.'

"See thou, great hawk! *Thou'lt* act the fool instead of Tom."

"But what of widow Margot, dame?"

"What, what! The Devil's tail! Thou talkest like the speaking bird a traveler once brought home from Ind, which cried 'What, what' all day! Beshrew me, if I'm not returned here in an hour with the motleys for thee, and Margot's right good will that *any* save her precious boy

may risk life and limb in such a brothel as the King of Cockney's court." And the witch was gone in a moment.

She was soon knocking at Margot's door. A serving woman opened it, and cried out at sight of her. "Hussy, am I a fifty-legged spider that thou bawleth so? Lead me to thy mistress, pot-keeler!" But the wench fled down the flagged passage, yelping as she ran, for dame Margot had roused her whole household with talk of the fiend she had seen at the witch's ingleside; and Bernice was forced to find her way to the common-room as best she might. Here she bustled in suddenly, much to the discomfiture of some of the town wives, who, hearing rumors of the widow's adventure at the hut, had dropped in for an evening cup with her, and the tale of the witch's black man. These dames soon left on various pretexts; each whispering warningly to widow Margot, when in the passage, against harboring such visitors as dame Bernice. Margot finally stood alone before the witch; now toasting herself in the chimney nook.

"Hast brought the letter, dame?" she asked tremulously, deeming it unwise to note that the witch had come sooner than she had promised.

"Nay," said the old woman solemnly, half closing her eyes, "nay, Master seneschal an' I burned it in his brazier. Ah, Losh heartlings! Widow Margot, what hast thou and thine not escaped! 'Twas dire news that messenger brought thither. Now breathe it not to e'en thy dearest gossip, or direr yet will be thy danger." The dame promised, her blue eyes bulging.

"The missive, dame, was from thy brother Peter, who

has left the kindgom to follow in young Louis' train to France. He sent thy son his cast-off garb, and said his Highness' chamberlain, commands thee to deck poor Tom therein, and send him straight to London town to bait the bears in the tower."

"What? Hearts me!"

"Yea, every year must just so many youths be sent to feed and urge the bears into the pits with prongs, and oft, if meat be high or scarce, they say the Prince orders, for a merry jest, one of the clowns locked in o' night, and on the morrow naught is left but bloody clouts, and mayhap, a bone or two."

"Ah, Mary, my precious boy!"

"'Tis ordered so," the witch calmly responded, nodding her head.

"O dame Bernice," cried the now terrified mother, "thou art great and wise, canst not aid me? Thou shalt have my golden beads and my blue stone brooch, if thou wilt but save poor Tom from this dire ending."

"If the lad goeth not to court, as commanded, widow, they'll send a troop of spearmen to raze thy house about thee."

The widow fell upon her knees, wringing her hands, and promising all that she had, if Bernice would but aid her. But the witch shook her head doubtfully, leaning on her staff and leering at the troubled Margot like a goblin.

"O, O," moaned Margot; "Mayhap the Bishop would aid us."

Then dame Bernice changed her manner. She brought

her staff down hard, and rose as if she had determined on great things.

"Now, I'll tell thee what I'll do — hast thou a horse?"

"Yea, there's piebald Bess, a goodly nag."

"Well, look ye (keep thy beads and gauds, but seek me out a double-gown of wool, for of a surety my shriveled limbs grow cold these bitter days); send thou the nag to me at once. Give me the motleys now. I'll send a substitute."

"Ah!" the grateful Margot would have kissed her hand; but the old woman shook her off —

"Fiderol! No fooleries! The motleys, wench, an' see thou tellest no soul of this; or thy Tom's substitute will *vanish*, and thy Tom must feed the bears."

"Vanish?" queried Margot, and she handed out the packet from a press.

"Aye, vanish like smoke — or a cloud."

"Wilt not tell me who shall be sent, dame?"

They were at the door now. The witch grinned in the darkness.

"Aye, stoop closer. I'll send a gay baiter in thy ninny's place, whom bears can never harm, beshrew me, if I'll not! I'll send, decked out in this fantastic garb—let's whisper now, or he might hear — I'll send the black man thou sawest in mine ingleside;" and with an eerie laugh, the witch disappeared in the night.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"Go to London to the Court."

JOCELIN made the journey between Ely and London ('twas some sixty miles or so) in good time, considering that Bess was a fat and pampered nag, and he an inexperienced traveler.

Toward evening on the second day from his starting, he came by the frozen Moorfields, where he marveled to see young men and lads skim and glide over the ice on skates made of bone; their merry shouts and laughter ringing out on the cold air; their gayly clad figures brightening the desolate landscape.

The cold and weary traveler found welcome at one of the small monasteries, numerous about London at that time, and, after spending the night there, on the next morning at sunrise, entered the city by Bishop's gate. He rode through Fleet street, and in his ignorance thought he must soon come upon Westminster, as this seemed a handsome thoroughfare, better built up than the crooked, narrow by-streets through which he had passed; but seeing among the plastered, whitened buildings none which would serve for a palace, he passed on, finally coming into Cheap, riding slowly through the icy slush and mud fetlock deep.

The high wooden buildings on either side seemed bending together at the tops, and as he gazed at the projecting, latticed windows piled one above another toward gabled

roofs, they seemed to hold many curious eyes peering at him from behind each dark, diamond-shaped opening.

It was so early that here and there a lantern flickered before the more pretentious tenements, for here were the Mercer's quarters, and guildmen of other trades.

Jocelin was dressed in a moth-eaten fox-tail cloak; a hood much resembling his monk's cowl covered his head entirely, and fell over his breast and shoulders. This curious headdress bore a cockscomb, and had bells at the corners. One of his legs was covered with checkered yellow and black; the other with green and red, and his gown of brown fustian was patched with divers colors. Few folk were stirring as yet, but two prentices made believe to strike at the piebald steed with their cudgels, and cried "Hoo la! Sir Ninny; thou ridest early."

But Jocelin had no ready answer, and only made them a monkish bow. Their address, however, impressed on him the fact that he was no longer aught but a jester, with a secret errand which demanded expediency; so he urged his steed past the prentices, leaving them to curse him for a sour faced churl.

"Hang me and draw me, such a lubber-lipped clown as but laughs for pay, Noll!" said one.

"Yea," answered his fellow, "methinks his Lord flogged him for his churlishness yester eve, and he hath run away to Cockney town. Aha! brave cock, your comb will be clipped here right soon!" and they called a derisive cock's crow after him.

Jocelin rode on until, turning into Fish street and round St. Magnus' corner, he came upon a staid burgher, who

civilly directed him on his way. The highway between Westminster and London was almost devoid of buildings, and, at that early hour, of travelers; and Jocelin, glancing back over the towers and roofs of the great city, thought how fair it must sit there by the riverside in the summer season; with its beautiful gardens; its grandeur and magnificence; and how pleasant it would be to idle under some shady willow by the river outside the city walls, listening to the merry clack of the water mills; or to wander through the vast Middlesex forests where he had heard that stag, deer, boars and numberless wild creatures roved under the green-wood trees, happy and free.

Free! Aye, and while he thought thus of pleasurable idling, Rohese was held prisoner; mayhap ere this, was insulted and dishonored. It was as if for a moment a sick man had slept and forgot his ill and then awoke in pain. Now all the old heartache and despair pressed upon him again, as with an exclamation, he urged his unwilling steed into a trot, until the towers of Westminster came in view.

It was not long ere he came to the gate of New Palace yard, so called to distinguish it from Edward the Confessor's courtyard. The new part of the palace had been built by William Rufus, and was enclosed on the north and west, and partially on the south; wall and buildings forming an unbroken line which was washed by the Thames.

Had Jocelin been familiar with the place, he would have gone to the west side where was the grand gateway; as it was, he paused at the first opening he came to, a small postern let in the north wall which opened on a sort of

crooked lane leading to the river. Ere he knocked, he admonished himself sharply.

"And now, poor wight, let thy wits serve thee, and play well thy part; though, by our Lady, I know naught of how a fool should speak or move, save what slight glimmering I could gain from dame Bernice, and a faint memory of some tale told as we, half frozen, came into the comfortable day-room after *Laudes!* to grease our sandals and to warm ere we went to the morning's work. Ehue! Now vanish, Jocelin de Brakelonda and appear Tom of fools, the widow Margot's son." And with his short assheaded truncheon Jocelin knocked at the postern gate sturdily and long.

"Sideath! Who poundeth so ramagiously?" growled a fat porter, opening the tiny grated window in the gate, and peering out.

"'Tis Tom, sir! poor Tom of Ely town, and Bess, his pretty speckly nag. I pray thee let us in, brother, for we're a cold!"

"Why callest thou me brother, fool?"

"All men are brothers, so thou art my brother, and being a fool's brother, must perforce be a fool, so good fool pray let us in."

"Bah, thou mouthing ape! Why comest thou hither to drag a hard driven wight from his first cup, with all thy poders?"

"Thou liest, churl! I had no *faders*. My mother was an honest dame, I'll have thee know, old pork, and I'd but *one fader*. I'm Tom, I tell thee, come from Ely town

at bidding of the Chamberlain. See thou this seal?" and he held it close.

"True enough! Come thou in, then, Master Tommy Addlepate. So thou art poor old Petro's nevy? By my beard, thou hast little o' the looks of him."

"Now dost not know, fat hairy face, that fools, like men, art not all cast within a selfsame mould? I am but a poor clown, who lives by foolery, and so fare lightly; therefore, feed and warm me, else I perish at thy feet. An' in sooth, by our Lady, a dunghill would be a fairer place to pass, methinks; but poor come, Bess' tail is but an icicle by —But how swear ye here in Cockneytown, Wight?"

"Why, fool, we say 'Ods fish!' 'Ha sideath!' or 'By God's true eyes,' as suiteth the occasion."

"Well, if they all are melon shaped like thou, old shadbelly, sideath, but they are Ods fish indeed!"

Some lackeys round the doorway of the offices guffawed loudly at this, and the porter, grumbling good-naturedly, hastened to deliver the fool's horse to a groom, and Jocelin, who had followed him into the palace was swallowed up in the crowd of scullions, lackeys and courtiers which thronged the chambers of Westminster.

Here he was soon at home among the servitors of the Prince's household, but save for a letter to dame Bernice (which remained unanswered), he could do nothing toward seeking for Rohese until the court returned from Northumberland, and so spent his time as best he might in the fortnight which passed ere John and Geoffrey, and that part of the court which had attended on the Prince in his northern castle, returned to London. Jocelin hailed their advent

with joy, believing that now he would discover Rohese's whereabouts. But he was doomed to disappointment.

There are periods in our lives when its stream of activity seems to ebb, leaving us bound in "shoals and shallows," where stranded, we lie idly awaiting the floodtide which shall bear us out again into the current. Such a time was now come to Jocelin.

The Bastard was too wary to make such unskilled spying as Jocelin's effective, and if he knew of Rohese's whereabouts he was not likely to proclaim it to the housetops. Seeing that the incontinent Prince never ceased talking of her beauty, and swore that Abbot, or no Abbot, by fair means or foul, he'd have the maid at court as soon as his indisposition was passed.

The truth was, there was among his mother's ladies a certain little termagant, with whom John had of late been dallying, and he prudently wished to dispose of this mistress, of whose temper and tongue he had a wholesome fear, ere he began a new amour; for, as the Abbot had foreseen, he purposed after making a conquest of Rohese, marrying her to his brother.

As it was, Jocelin had little time in which to further his plans, for a jester must ever be within call. A pampered voluptuary, John hailed any infusion of novelty into the stale, flat atmosphere of court life, and rejoiced to find his new jester far more entertaining than Peter, as his wit had a tang of wildness in it; a sort of fantastic irony, which the ennuied Prince found refreshing to his jaded mentality and so Jocelin was often in attendance on him. After a while John began to suspect that his jester concealed under

his pert speech a sombre depth of mind, differing much from that of the ordinary buffoon. And, growing curious, he often questioned him as to his former life (though without enlightenment); and more than once showed the fool a careless kindness.

One day in a hallway of the palace, he passed Jocelin leaning in a window recess very pale and melancholy.

"What now, Sir fool?" said he. "Is thy trade dull that thou mopest in a corner like a love-sickened wench?"

"'Tis a dull trade that plays the fool to sorrow, my Liege!"

"Sorrow! What knowest such as *thou* of sorrow, Idle-head? Thy buist 'tis to make us laugh, and so perforce thou must lead a merry life. How comest thou to be a fool, if thou'rt so sorrowfully inclined?"

"Sire, I began life amongst wise men, and so, Ods heartlings, learned early the vanity of life!"

"Nay, that is not half an answer," responded John, laughing half vexedly, "See thou, Geff," he said to Geoffrey, who, with several lords in waiting, had come up. "Come, catechize thou me this slippery loony, and harrow out the gist of his feigned melancholy."

Between Geoffrey and Jocelin there was a mutual antipathy. The Favorite, though the jester held aloof from him, (indulging in no jibes at his expense as was his way with the other courtiers), felt uncomfortable when he caught the brooding glance turned upon him, and shunned him whenever it was possible. So it was with palpable dislike and contempt that he now began:

"Come, fellow, tell his Highness what matter of man art thou, outside thy fooleries."

"Like many another finer wight, my Lord, I'm but a fool who lives by lying," responded Jocelin, never raising his eyes from the truncheon which he idly turned in his thin hands.

"Chut, ass, *say* how thou lived before thou camest hither — what kind of habitation hadst thou, what employment, what livelihood?"

"I was e'en then as now, sir Chancellor, a poor wight, with a borrowed habitation; when my cap was on my noodle then my house was thatched; when my cloak was tied my chest was packed."

"Why, scurvy knave, I'll have thee whipped!" exclaimed Geoffrey in a rage, for he noticed the scarcely concealed smile of the others and with his gloved hand he smote Jocelin with all his force upon the cheek. Prince John restrained him.

"Nay, coz, why so wroth at a fool's folly? Why of late thou hast been as full of spleen as a childing wench." Geoffrey mumbling a scant apology, said impatiently —

"Wilt come, your Highness? The audience awaiteth thee; the hall is thronged." But the Prince urged them all on with a wave of his hand. "I'll follow ye, gentles." He was not yet done with his queer jester. Jocelin's face bore the print of the Favorite's heavy hand, and his lips tightened, but he guffawed loud as the gentlemen followed Geoffrey's wake, and cried —

"Nay, bullyrook, why such a poder? A house divided shall not stand. So 'twere ill that a courtier strike a fool."

"Why so, loon?" queried one of the lords-in-waiting, turning 'round.

"Zooks, sir, 'tis well done to ask me why; beshrew me, an' thou'lt learn more of me than of thy wiseacres, for I *can* and *will* tell thee the truth, my Lord; 'tis 'cause a favorite and a fool live both by favor; and Ods fish, but favor, like fortune, was e'er a tricky jade." Geoffrey reddened at this, though he affected not to hear it, for 'twas whispered in the palace that his vogue was waning since the return from Northumberland.

"By Venus' zone, thou art a merry wight in truth," chuckled John, throwing a coin to the jester, as he turned to follow his courtiers, "But why dost thou so smile, fool?"

"Why, my Liege, I still perforce must smile that none can see how sad I am."

CHAPTER XXVII.

"Yea, now Life, deal me Death.
Your *worst*, your vaunted worst.
Across my breast, with trembling hands,
I gird me for the best!"

THE days went by like clouds across the wind-swept sky, but whatever variety of experience they brought to Jocelin, the thought of Rohese was the warp of his life, into which his dreaming and waking hours were woven. He lived a dual existence. One man, the *real* Jocelin, lurked and spied and waited; or with a wild impatient sense of helplessness, raged by night alone in his little chamber; the other, Tom, the jester, capered and jibed; sat oft at the Prince's table, was fed by him, as one feeds a pet dog, on the dainties unknown to his fellow-servitors and thrown certain gifts of money, when his drolleries pleased.

On the other hand he was the butt of all the cruel jests and practical jokes of palace and office. He slept near the royal stables in a tiny chamber, palleted with straw, and for a long time the only friend he had was a poor grey ape, the property of the dead Peter, which, left to starve by careless scullions, evinced a grateful love toward the man who succored it, and often at night warmed it beneath his motley coat, as they shivered on the straw together. Of late his lot had been the harder, that the Prince had lost the great jeweled pendant which he wore suspended from his belt, and so was particularly illhumored, and there

was much covert spying and suspicion abroad in the palace, with general discord everywhere, for when the sun is in eclipse, the earth dwellers below him must sit in gloom.

So, having seemingly incurred the unrelenting hatred of Geoffrey, and finding no protection now from a good-natured master, poor Jocelin often paid the penalty of the general illhumor with his back; for, unskilled in his calling, he never knew just where to end the jibe or stop the vacant laugh, and many were the stripes laid upon him.

He would have been entirely desolate had not some happy chance brought him a friend in the form of the Master Armorer, a dwarfish little Norman, whose great head and long arms seemed far too heavy for the rest of his short body. Jocelin had found him on his couch in a high fever from a wound inflicted by Geoffrey who, angry that the Armorer had beaten him in a bout with the broadsword, had thrust him deeply in the thigh; and the neglected wound bade fair to end the fellow's life, when Jocelin nursed him to health again, prescribing such remedies as he had learned of in the Abbey schools. This was the beginning of the friendship, and when the Armorer expressed his gratitude to the kind fool, and promised to requite his pains, the latter asked that he be allowed to come to the Armory, and under the Norman's tutorage, learn to wield the broadsword and carry the buckler.

"By Saint Francis, chucky fool!" he cried, "Thou art the first, methinks, of thy calling who feared not the sword as a mincing hussy fears a raton. I'll teach thee the trick of broadswording, if thou so desirest, but for one of thy condition 'tis best to learn a dagger thrust or two, for

who would fight with a fool? A blow from behind, my bucco, is the way for such as thou to settle up old scores." Jocelin turned white at this, though he made some jesting answer as he hurried away. He brooded on the Armorer's words all day and that night he whispered to the ape as they huddled on the straw —"By the rood, little frere, that Norman is a very devil. What saw he in mine eye that he should speak me thus?"

As day by day passed with no message from the witch of Ely, Jocelin concluded that she had left her home to follow up some new clue; so, relying on her mysterious powers, he began to hope that she had restored Rohese to freedom; and though he did not abate his watch upon the Favorite, he began to "possess his soul with patience" until such a time as the welcome news of Rohese's safety should leave him free to return to St. Edmunds. Still, not to miss a chance, however slight, of finding the maid, Jocelin persistently followed De Clifford, who never went forth unattended, but a thin, bent figure skulked after him; often, often it followed his horse like a shadow, and usually the quest ended far into the heart of London town, where in Jewery, in a weather-beaten old manor house, whose lands the busy town had long since usurped, Geoffrey would alight, and entering, spend an hour or so; but he always returned alone, and poor Jocelin gained naught for all his spying but weary limbs and bedraggled garments. Finally, finding his watch of the Favorite to be futile, he grew almost confident that the witch would some day send him a message that all was well, and it grew to be a daily habit with him to say to the ape each morning —

"Well, little wiseacre, will the good news come today?" and the ape, with its head on one side, would chatter knowingly.

Alas for Jocelin's high hopes, for dame Bernice had sent him no message because, in her poor hut, she lay ill unto death, with good dame Margot and another village wife endeavoring to cure her with such simples as they knew. As long as she was conscious she forbade them to take from her either her cap, cloak or staff. So one morning she lay fully dressed on her truckle-bed, a dreadful sight to see; and when in delirium she called upon Hecate, Asmodeus, aye, e'en the foul fiend himself, her attendants became so frightened that they ran from the cot, and did not return till midday. The snow sparkled silver-white under the noon sun; the hut stood black against the gleaming, ice-bound river; no smoke curled from its wide chimney against the cloudless blue sky; on a bough near the door a red-breasted robin chirped a promise of the end of winter's reign. At the threshold sat the good dog Dunstan, his black muzzle turned to the sky, howling mournfully. Presaging evil, dame Margot braved his angry growls and pushed by him, followed by her neighbor.

The one small window of the poor room let in a tiny stream of sunlight, which fell across the witch's couch. Asmodeus had proven false to his "familiar," and the promise of the fifty added years of life was never to be fulfilled, for dame Bernice's face was waxen white; her deep-set eyes fixed and staring, and the black cat licked the cold, claw-like hand, mewing piteously. She had

gone to find if there be "remembrance in the grave!" The witch of Ely was dead.

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When another fortnight had passed, without a sign from dame Bernice, Jocelin lost his assurance, and grew restless; action being the great assuager of suspense, he naturally turned to the Armory for comfort, and practised his sword exercise so diligently that the Armorer soon pronounced him a good pupil, though "weak i' the wrist." The Armory was a long, low room hung with armor, old and new; stacks of lances leant in corners upon piles of battleaxes, and there were racks of weapons of all kinds and ages. At one end the Norman had hung his best swords against the wall above a seat in front of which was the space reserved for fencing. Often as he and Jocelin thrust and cut at each other, a tall, melancholy man, with long, black hair and careless dress, would saunter in, and lounging on the seat, listlessly watch them for a while, and then go slowly away, with a mere nod at the fencers. Jocelin never knew him to speak, and when he had come and gone several times, he asked the Norman his name.

"Know'st not Blondel de Nesle? Then thou *art* a fool, indeed! That, ninny, is King Richard's Rimer; he grieved sore at being left behind his royal master, and now, that it is known that his Highness has left the Holy Land this sixth month, and none can tell in what country he has arrived, the minstrel hath become confounded with melancholy, as thou seest. Some day, wight, I'll wager thee my best bladed broad, he'll vanish from the palace like a

quick-winged shaft; and then we'll know that he's about that which he's oft vowed — seeking the King."

After that, Blondel de Nesle was a source of much interest to the jester; until one morning, as the Armorer prophesied, he left the palace secretly, and sailing from Dover to Normand shores, set out to traverse the country in search of news of King Richard.

Some days after Blondel's disappearance, Geoffrey rode forth one dark night, with Jocelin following as usual. He passed through the city into Jewery; entered the Manor house, which Jocelin had long since learned belonged to Benedict the Jew; and the fool, as usual, waited to see him come forth again.

The time set for the payment of the money borrowed on the stolen pendant had passed, and the Favorite and his mother had been able to raise but a small tithe of the sum with the heavy usury Benedict exacted. The pendant was almost useless to the Jew, in that to break it up meant a great lessening of its value, and to sell it anywhere would result in his instant arrest and certain death, for it was known in all the neighboring courts as one of the most splendid of England's jewels, and really belonged to King Richard. So in his last interview with De Clifford, Benedict said plainly that if the money was not forthcoming in a certain time he would deliver the jewel to Prince John, and trust to receiving his reward from him, rather than wait longer for so uncertain a recompense. In vain had Prioress Rosamund pleaded; Benedict was inflexible. In vain had she offered him certain lands near Oxfordtown at Godstowe, granted her by Henry. The wily Jew knew his

old enemy, the Church, too well to believe he would ever be allowed to hold so rich a property.

Finding her proffers refused, the Prioress left London, pausing at the Priory only long enough to see that Rohese was safe, and pressing on to Godstowe, where she purposed abstracting certain jewels and plate held in trust there for an infant heiress the nuns were rearing. After some delay, she returned to London with her spoil, by which (though it valued but half enough) she hoped to gain time in which to raise the rest.

It was to meet her that Geoffrey rode to the Jewery this night; and he left in high good humor. The Jew, mollified by Rosamund's payment, had granted them a month's continuance, and the Prioress had pledged her son that ere the month had passed De Cokefeld gold should pay the debt.

Jocelin, crouched in the miry lane behind the Manor wall, saw a woman come out with Geoffrey, and stand in the doorway as he mounted. She was tall, lithe, and muffled in a black veil, so that he could not see her features in the dim light coming from the hall behind her. She waved a white hand to the courtier, who responded with a flourish of his plumed cap, and a gay "Sweet dreams, my dear Rose-lady!"

Though standing ankle deep in icy mire, and lately shivering in the cold wind, the sweat broke out on Jocelin. There was no mistaking that tall and graceful figure, or that long, taper hand; then too, Geoffrey had called her his "Rose." The dreaded calamity had fallen; Rohese was lost to all good and purity forever. Hidden away in the

old Jew's house, she had finally accepted her fate, and now, to all appearances, seemed loth to let her lover depart.

"Ah, Jesu, I thought not she was so ripe that she would lie so tame within such hands. Rohese, Rohese!" he cried, leaping the wall, stretching out his arms as he came into the dim circle of light, his painted jester's face ghastly in its agony. She started at sound of his voice, and drew her veil more closely about her, but she looked at him intently for a moment; then she archly shook one taper finger at him, and with a low laugh, closed the door.

Jocelin stood as if turned to stone. "Had I heard that one of the blessed images of the saints had descended from her pedestal to play the wanton," he muttered, "I might have believed that sooner than this, but by the blood! I cannot believe such prostitution of sweet womanhood when I behold it with mine very eyes. Alas, Rohese, how changed thy very laugh is. Sideath! 'Tis said that wantoning and drinking late will coarse the voice and dim the eye. How thou must have reveled at it then, Madam! Alas, alas, for the maid and monk that were, and woe, ah woe, for the poor fool that now is."

Jocelin turned slowly, and plodded the weary miles which lay between him and the palace, threading the dark way with faltering footsteps, peering through the night in dry-eyed grief, but when he reached his straw, and the little ape cuddling close to welcome him, laid one small black hand upon his, the hot tears falling fast washed the paint from his cheek as he laid it against the friendly beast's, crying, "Ah, little ape, woe, woe, for the poor, poor fool!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"There was no one to ask me why I wept."

ROSAMUND had not counted on a lengthy absence from the Priory, or she would not have left Sister Isopel in charge of Rohese; knowing well that should the maid become aggressive to that turbulent woman, her violent temper would conquer her judgment, and the prisoner would be likely to suffer severe mental and physical discomfort.

Many weeks of solitary confinement are conducive to taming the most haughty spirit, and Rohese's imprisonment, broken by daily visitations from the red-faced, harsh-voiced virago, was well nigh unendurable. For, following the Prioress' instructions, Sister Isopel daily represented to Rohese in no measured terms the difficulties of her position, and the advantages of an alliance which would remove her disgrace and set her among the proudest of the land; to queen it in court; through her husband (the Favorite) ruling the Prince, and through him, the realm.

At first Rohese, moved to wrath, would reply spiritedly, defending herself against the sneers and innuendoes of her persecutor; but her girlish repartee availed little against the shrew, whose cruel lash of words fell hard and fast lacerating all finer feeling, and wounding to its core the maiden heart; until, what with scant fare, rough usage and confinement, the once high-spirited Rohese was reduced to a shadow of her former self. Day by day a deeper

melancholy settled upon her, and her passive acceptance of Sister Isopel's taunts goaded that ill-tempered woman into an added fury at what she called "Fine lady airs and sulkeries," and she often snatched Rohese's portion of food from her ere she could eat it, and departing with many revilings, forced the girl to fast through the day.

However, as weeks passed and the Prioress did not return, Sister Isopel began to grow alarmed at the result of her methods, for Rohese's strength failed rapidly, and she sat in the dreary chamber, gazing through her tears toward De Cokefeld until one morning she could not swallow the broth which Sister Isopel (with much compunction) had herself prepared, and lay listless and white through the long hours, until the nun, now thoroughly frightened, asked her in softened tones if there was aught she wished for — and Rohese replied in a broken voice that as she did not think she had long to live, she wished to be shrived of her sins, that she might pass in peace. Though she sneered at this, Sister Isopel, on looking again at the wan face on the pillow, muttered to herself as she left the room:

"Ah well now, who can prophesy what shall transpire, an' 'twere not well to have such an refusal upon one's soul should the maid's forebodings come true, which Jesu forbid."

But on inquiring for Brother Simon, she found that he had left the Priory to be gone some days, and, after turning the matter over in her mind, and seeing no possible harm that could arise from such an action, Sister Isopel dispatched a messenger to Bradfield house, stating that as

her superior and the Priory chaplain were absent, and a person lay ill who was desirous of being shrived, she ventured to apply to his Lordship, the Abbot, for a confessor who should come to the Priory speedily.

Since the disappearance of Jocelin, and the imprisonment of Rohese, Abbot Samson was a changed man; bereft of the gentle influences which naturally arise from a fostering love for younger and dependent creatures, he grew morose and irritable, and at times so savage in administering rebukes and punishments for small offenses in his household, that discontent and hatred began to lurk in the Abbey, though as yet, none had dared to openly rebel. Then, too, as a strong supporter of King Richard, cognizant of the plots and counter-plots for the throne by the Prince and his adherents, he chafed under the state of affairs in England, and the King's continued absence; and since for nearly a year no news had come from the absent monarch, he had begun to fear, as did many of the nobles, that Richard had been murdered after leaving the siege of Jerusalem, or was held prisoner in some foreign land.

So, for some time past the loyal subjects of the realm had been holding councils, sending out messengers, and in all ways endeavoring to bring England's rightful ruler home again.

Blondel had left London with Abbot Samson's approval, and with letters to certain persons of rank and power in the continental countries, but after an absence of some weeks, no news had come from him, and the King's adherents

feared that he, like former messengers, had failed in his quest.

So it was that when, with many cares upon him, oppressed by sorrow and regret for the fall of his favorite, and the wantonness of his ward, the Abbot, heartsore and irritable, sat busied with voluminous correspondence, word was brought that a clown craved audience, he impatiently ordered the messenger to repair to the offices, to await some more convenient time. So the messenger cooled his heels about the servitor's quarters of Bradfield for several hours, until the secretary plucked up courage to remind his Lord that he waited. Now, had the messenger (an ignorant churl) *delivered* his message on his arrival, he would have soon been back at the Priory with the desired confessor. But, as Samson was unaware of the urgent nature of his errand, it was evening, and they had supped ere the messenger was called before him.

When he stammered out his story the Abbot's manner changed, and with self-reproach, mentally assigning himself a penance for his neglect, he began to interrogate the fellow. Asked the name of the sick person, the clown answered, "I cannot say, my Lord." And when the Abbot questioned him more closely, he replied:—

"La, now my Lord, I dare not say, if I knew, but by Saint Swain, around the buttery me heard the sisters whisper that our Lady rejoiced to get her claws (methinks, my Lord, they said) upon the young one, and that Sister Isopel hath a hard fist for smiting, as the bruises on the poor maid's limbs and throttle showed."

"What pratest of, fellow?" interrupted the Abbot. "I

asked *who* desired confession, and here thou pourest the small ale of nunnery gossip in our ears. Who lies ill at the Priory, churl?"

"La, now, an' crave thy worship's pardon; didst I not say the maid was Lady ————, nay, I mind not her name now, but they've used her but unkindly, it seemeth to me—starved and beaten her mayhap, and so the poor bird being drooping and all aweary of the cruel cage, seeketh to mount to Heaven on the wings of a ghostly father's prayers." The Abbot sprang to his feet with a look on his face not good to see.

"Zounds! And does that — that, Prioress, dare to vent her spleen upon our ward! Is't Lady de Cokefeld thou speakest of, fellow?"

"Aye, Highness, that was the name they whispered."

"Get thee to horse, messenger; get thee to horse. Come thou Brother Rudolph; we'll look well into this matter, so prepare thee for a journey. I sent the girl for spiritual correction, not for abuse, by my halidame!"

"But, my Lord, the way is long, and it is dark and cold," protested the secretary.

"Since when hast thy blood grown too thin to brave the cold at thy Lord's ordering, Rudolph?" said the Abbot in grave disapproval. Rudolph blushed and left the room answering, "I shall be ready in a little space, Dominie, who shall ride with me?"

"Didst think I would send forth one of my household to do what I would not, my son? *I* ride with thee." So the Abbot and his secretary set off. As they mounted, Rudolph noted with some wonder that his Lord wore a

great black capuchin above a brown monk's robe, but this change of dress was soon explained, for as they rode the Abbot said:

"Now, my son, as I desire to speak with this lady unknown by her and the inmates of the Priory, do you tell Sister Isopel that I am a Norman monk, under oath of silence, who hath been sent by the Abbot to confess the ailing person; and fail not, Rudolph, to ask when the Prioress returns."

When they reached the Priory, and Sister Isopel greeted them in the Hospitium, the capuchined monk stood aloof, his hood drawn over his face.

Isopel was volubly explanatory until the secretary cut short her flow of words by directing her to lead the Norman father to the confessional.

"Confessional, my brother? What would we there? The wench lies sulking in her chamber, contending that she is unable to rise, though I have reproved her sorely." The Norman father gritted his teeth, and Rudolph, fearing an outbreak, urged the nun to show them to the invalid's chamber. So, taper in hand, Sister Isopel led the way.

"By the rood!" muttered the Abbot. "What fools men be. Such an Abbot as I should change his mitre for a fool's cap. I forgot me clear that Rosamund bore a grudge against Rohese." This was the first time he had spoken of her by name since Jocelin's trial, and it seemed to choke him. "I might have known though, what this green-eyed cat would do once she had leave to scratch."

"Hark," said Isopel to Rudolph, "the holy man prayeth already. And the Abbot, made aware by her whisper

that he was thinking aloud, ceased his muttering, and followed them in silence, tugging at his great beard until he was near pulling it forth from the hood in which he had so carefully concealed it. When they were come to the chamber, Sister Isopel, unlocking the door, set the taper in a sconce, and she and Rudolph retired, and the Abbot and Rohese were face to face. In the dim light, she did not penetrate his disguise as he, in a low voice said "*Pax Vobiscum*, my daughter," and sat him near the couch, his back to the light.

Rohese lay like some white lily cut from the stalk and placed, languid and drooping, against a dark background. As long as she could use her mental and physical forces, she braved all danger and bore all burdens; but at last, imprisoned and continually persecuted by a relentless jailer who daily impressed on her her abasement, her hold on life loosened, and she sank into a melancholy whose next state was madness or death.

Tears glistened in the Abbot's eyes as he looked on this penitent, who, too weak to kneel, folded her transparent hands upon her breast, and bowing her head, began the low whispered words of the confessional, "Father, I have sinned —" She told the story of the journey to Bradfield; her connection with Jocelin; his love and the result. Then the trial, and the lie she had told to save him from the torture. Her confessor uttered an exclamation and instead of uttering admonition, he said eagerly, "Continue, my child." Rohese then told of her escape, and Jocelin's rescue; of their flight to Ely with the witch, and her final

interception by the Prioress. Then she spoke of the marriage which they urged upon her:—

"Indeed, Father, I would that our Lord, the Abbot, had not so utterly cast me off, for should they force me in my weakness, into this hated alliance, he would be full wroth, I know. He loved my mother long ago, as once methinks he loved me," and the Abbot, remembering One who wrote in the sand, saying, "He that is without sin, let him cast the first stone at her," bit his lip till the blood came.

"But, Father," continued Rohese, "my release comes speedily; for my dear mother stood beside me last night, and smilingly said, 'Be thou of good cheer, for joy and peace shall come upon thee, after sore tribulation'; and where is joy and peace for such as I save in Heaven? So shrive me, Father, speedily, for we know not when the hour cometh. Are my sins so great that thou canst not give me comfort, holy frere?"

"Nay, nay, my child, but thy end is far distant from these days. Thou shalt return to De Cokefeld, and resting there among thy bower-maids and thy faithful servitors, breathe the pure air and soon grow lusty again!"

"Nay, good frere, I'll never go hence save on a bier, for if (as they say) by this marriage I could defy my Liege's mandate, and thus regain my freedom, I'll never wed the Prioress Rosamund's son; and as the Abbot has spurned me, and not one of all my father's friends raised hand or voice in my defence, I'll fall here like a frost-nipped leaf, and lie within a moldy tomb, where some kindly nun shall sometimes say a prayer, when all have long forgot who lies there." Was it a sigh she heard? Rohese turned her

head in wonder, but the black figure sat immovable, silhouetted against the faint yellow light; then kneeling by her couch, it murmured a prayer, whose import she could not catch, and rising, shrived her from her sins. Then extending his hand in silent benison, the father said in an abrupt voice, whose tones startled her:

"Thou shalt sleep in De Cokefeld the night of the first day thou canst accomplish the journey, sweet maid, for I will intercede for thee with this cruel Abbot Samson."

At noon the next day the Prioress returned. Her humor was not of the best, for the anxiety and the long journeys she had made of late had tried her nerves; so when Sister Isopel, in fear and trembling, led the way to Rohese's chamber, and she saw at a glance what the virago had compassed in her absence, she fell into a cold fury terrible to see, with one glance sending the frightened Isopel scurrying from the room, following her with a sentence which made the robust nun tremble like an aspen:

"Thou hast not *yet* been *tried* for that flogging of the novice to death in Flanders some eight years agone, *dear* Sister Isopel."

At once Rohese was removed to the comfort of the Prioress' own bower. Brother Simon prescribed sundry medicines for her, the daintiest fare and the kindest treatment were showered upon her; for who could be sweeter than Rosamund when she chose? So with such assiduous care and the cheering memory of the confessor's promise, Rohese revived and lifted up her head like a drought parched flower after a summer's rain. The wily Prioress humbled herself before the girl, weepingly confessing her anger at

the refusal of Geoffrey's suit, but maintaining that she intended no cruelty, and had punished the wicked woman who had so unkindly treated her poor little guest. Rohese, touched by the assiduous nursing and these crocodile tears, believed in her, and out of the goodness of her heart forgave her enemy, who only sought to woo her back to health and strength, that she might the better gain her ends.

Some ten days or so after her return, Prioress Rosamund, walking daintily over the damp floor of the office corridor, came upon a kneeling nun, who, with cloth and pail, cleansed the passage. It was Sister Isopel reduced to menial service by her superior. She looked up, and in a spiteful voice, which she vainly tried to render respectful, begged the lady to pause.

"What! Darest thou speak to thy offended superior thou murderous, ill inclined creature? Thou art so full of venom I wonder that thou turnest not to a warty toad."

"I did but obey *thee*, madam," sullenly muttered Isopel, "but that is neither here nor there; I have this for thee," and extracting a folded slip of parchment from her bosom, with her rough wet hand gave it into the lily white one of Rosamund, who, when she had read it, started as if stung by an adder.

"Whence hadst thou this, foul shrew?" she almost shrieked, stamping her foot and shaking the kneeling Isopel by the shoulder.

"Why in sooth, Lady, from the Norman father from the Abbey, who wrote it ere he departed with the Abbot's secretary."

"Father? What father, minion?"

"Well, that mewling puny wench thou seemest *now* to set such store by, thought soon to pass, and pleaded for confession, and so Brother Simon being at Waltham, I —"

"Thou — thou viper! Thou let'st in an Abbey monk to speak with her. O fool, fool, we are undone! I wonder ere this the walls were not harried about our ears. What manner of man was this father?"

"Tall and heavy of build, madam. Dressed —"

"Bah! I meant not his dress; his person! His voice! What like was he?"

"How could I tell thee of his face or voice, seeing that he was covered with a great capouch, and, being under a vow, spoke not?"

"Curious, curious! Was he smooth or bearded? Surely thou couldst tell that, hag?"

"Well now, I mind me when they left the hospitium I saw a great grizzled beard stick from 'neath his hood like straw from a carter's basket!"

"We are undone, indeed, indeed," cried the Prioress. "My poor son; what *shall* I do? I'll pay thee well for that night's work, Sister Isopel; thou shalt go back to that Flanders nunnery whence I rescued thee," and pallid with rage and excitement, the Prioress hurried away, reading again and again the two lines written in a well-known hand: —

"Send Rohese De Cokefeld to her castle as soon as she can endure the journey.

SAMSON ABBITIS."

CHAPTER XXIX.

"Ivit in Alemanniam cum donis plurimis."

ROSAMUND DE CLIFFORD showed that she well knew the Abbot when she wondered that he had not visited his wrath upon those disregarding his commands. She was at her wit's end. Something engaged Samson's attention, of that she was sure, or ere this he would have found that Rohese was still at the Priory, and when he did find it out the Prioress expected to lose her holdings, or to at least be punished in some other way. "Yet, what matters it," she argued as she paced her chamber that night, "so long as Geoffrey is Rohese's husband? If this be compassed, then I can brave even Samson; and as he has not yet discovered that the maid is still detained here, I'll risk it further, by my troth!" The Prioress planned and plotted by her fire far into the night, whilst outside the wind shrieked and moaned, as if the spirit of old Bernice strove ineffectually to warn Rohese of the danger which menaced her.

Ere noon the next day Rohese and the Prioress, with Sister Isopel, escorted only by the attendants of the maid's horse litter, set off for Godstowe; the Prioress having sent Brother Simon to Bradfield for news.

"Our Lord, the Abbot, hath so appointed it, dear child!" purred Rosamund, as she rode beside the litter. "Thy tirewoman and belongings await thee at Godstowe, and she shall attend on thee there until thou art quite restored. The nunnery is of cheerful situation, and as soon as these

snows have melted I'll show thee merry Oxfordtown, and we shall make a pilgrimage to that fair bower at Woodstock where Henry built the labyrinth of walks and ways to hide me from the Queen."

Thus Rohese, gladly anticipating a reunion with Mary, went to Godstowe like a lamb to the slaughter.

As the Prioress suspected, there was good reason why Abbot Samson had not seen further to the safety of his ward. On his return from the Priory he had found a letter from the Regent, Long-champs of Ely, stating that he had summoned parliament to convene at Westminster Abbey, and urging the Abbot to hastily repair there. His letter enclosed a few lines signed by Blondel, which stated that King Richard, held prisoner by the German Emperor, languished in the Duke of Austria's dungeon, whence a great ransom would release him. A statement of the amount demanded, and the name of the King's prison completed the epistle.

Now, all the world knows the story of Blondel; how he wandered from France into Germany, and by good hap came to a tiny village upon the bank of the Danube, near the Duke of Austria's stronghold, Greifenstein. Blondel took lodging here as he knew the grudge which Austria bore Richard, and hoped to find some trace of the King in this stronghold of his enemy.

Finally he discovered that there were two Englishmen imprisoned in the square tower of the castle, on the charge of attempting to poison the Duke. When he learned this, Blondel went to the castle, and, as a minstrel easily makes acquaintance, it was not long before he was free of hall

and bower, and had learned all that the servitors knew, not much more than what the villagers had told him. In vain he spied and bribed; the jailer was unapproachable, and none but he and the Duke himself went near the tower; till at last, when almost despairing of learning the identity of the prisoners, Blondel walked one night beneath the balcony surrounding the tower, and struck idly on his lute the chords of a song he and King Richard had composed. Then he began to sing: —

"Your beauty, lady fair,
None views without delight,"

when in the well-known tones of Richard's voice the song was finished —

"No nymph my heart can wound,
If favor she divide,"

and the King in joyful accents, hailing his faithful minstrel, imparted the story of his capture, and the welcome news which Austria had lately revealed that the Emperor, in dire need of money, was sending to England a demand for a great ransom; threatening if it was not forthcoming to put his prisoners to death.

"But by the rood, my dear Rimer, is my brother so rich in love for me that he'll relinquish any part of his inheritance for the saving of England's rightful ruler? Nay, only friend of mine, go back to England with the message if thou wilt, but thou'lt never see thy master more."

Outstripping the Emperor's messenger, Blondel hastened back to England, and soon the news was spread over the

realm that the lost was found, and England could have her King again.

So the Abbot set forth in state for London, attended by the Prior, escorted by a score or more of archers and spearmen, and preceded by the monks who bore his silver cross, his mitre and his purse; and in due time they came to Westminster, where he joined the parliament convened in one of the small chapels of the Abbey.

The chapel was a long rectangular room, lighted from one side by windows set half way toward the ceiling; between these were stucco effigies of saints and monarchs overlaid with gold and silver. Opposite the windows, a balcony extended over the many low-arched doors, and the room was embellished for the occasion with blue tapestries embroidered with golden lions hung on the walls by tenter hooks.

The two Bishops who were Regents, and the Prince sat on a dais richly canopied with gold-fringed red and white damask, which had been erected beside the altar rail, behind which a great carved wooden tree sprang from a recumbent statue of Jesse. The boughs, bearing the figures of the descendants of Jesse's line, reached high toward the roof, forming a screen behind the altar; and back of it the sunshine streamed upon the assembly through a great rose window of rarest colored glass.

At a table before the dais, the lords spiritual and temporal sat in gilded chairs. The temporal lords in gay bejeweled brocades and velvets, bordered with furs, with their coronets and caps. The spiritual lords in vestments of purple, white, scarlet and black, decked with rare laces and fine orfreys of apparels, embroideries and goldsmith-

work. Their mitres and crosiers representing as much power as that indicated by the swords of the barons of England.

Abbot Samson sat at one end of the table with Rudolph, tablets in hand, behind him; and the jester gazed upon them from the balcony above whence he had stolen, unobserved by the chamberlains, who, with short silver staves, guarded the doors of the chapel that none might enter save those entitled to sit in the presence of these mighty ones of the realm.

Hidden by the balcony's rail, Jocelin peered down directly into the face of his beloved Abbot with a heart-hungry stare, which surely would have drawn an answering glance if the great man had not been engaged with the Bishop of Ely, who was stating the amount of the ransom demanded for the King.

"Who shall be sent, my lords?" asked John. "Methinks the messenger should be neither so high as to risk another imprisonment, nor so low as to offend the dignity of the Emperor. Therefore I stipify that no one of royal blood shall be sent."

The Regents, desirous that the Church should have the honor of ransoming the King, agreed readily to this, and asked that the legate be chosen from among the churchmen. Then followed long discussion as to who was fitted for the task. Some of the parliament nodded in their chairs, as the day wore on; some stammered, and knew not what they meant to say. Some of the barons, for fear of John, received his stipification as ruling them out of the affair, though some were so burdened with the reasons why they

could not go, whilst others *should*, that ere they finished, their conclusions could be construed by none. There were a few who fiercely *demanded* that they be sent, as if bent on making a great show of loyalty; while knowledge of John's conspiracy with France and its possible success, kept some from pressing their nominations.

Finally Abbot Samson rose from his chair. "Surely we can but know a herald's body is ever sacred. So there could be no danger to any one who conveyed the ransom. I myself am prepared to go in quest of our Lord, the King, working either by subterfuge, or openly, as the accredited legate of England; and by the arrow of St. Edmunds, I'll have audience with the Emperor and ransom forth our monarch. Fie, my lords, should loyal subjects hang back on mere pretences from their pressing duty? To council straight, my Lords, how shall we raise this ransom, for, *I* shall carry it.

"In all England," said the Bishop of Norwich, "there lies not treasure enough to pay this sum."

"Yea, where shalt so great a sum be realized?" protested the Prince. Already all freeholds and cities rebel 'gainst heavy taxation. The Jews' exchequer hath squeezed those money-grabbers dry. The scutage moneys have scarce afforded food for our hungry sold'ry. Speak, my lords of the treasury, what has the treasury of the realm to offer on this ransom?"

One grey old knight arose at this, and fumbling with his golden chain, mumbled, "Your Grace, were we to pay one-tenth of it 'twould strip the treasury bare."

"By our Lady," said Clare, "at least we the Advocates

of St. Edmunds can give of our privy purses," and turning to the clerks of the parliament, he bade them set him down for a goodly sum. This example was followed by others.

"The Church hath chalices and platters of silver which she can spare," said John of Suffolk. "Let each holding give according to its ability."

Then spoke certain lords of the treasury who had been in deep converse with Geoffrey and the Earl of Bigot, suggesting that as the shrine of St. Edmunds was covered with gold, part of it could be removed for use in this extremity. Samson, who until this had been computating the amount his Abbey could offer, exclaimed angrily at this: —

"Know ye for certain that I will in no wise do this, neither is there power to force consent from me. Though by the Saint's severed head, will I open the doors of the church that he who will may strip the shrine. The absent who have offended our holy St. Edmund have been known to suffer therefrom. What punishment think ye, then, will be meted to those who strip his vestment from his sacred body? Let him who dares, stand forth."

But though the irate Abbot called each lord of the treasury by name, each answered in turn "Not I, my Lord," and the shrine was not meddled with. Then the nobles, willing or unwilling, gave of their wealth. Archbishops, Bishops and Abbots pledged the treasures of their convents. The Queen, through a lord-in-waiting, proffered certain jewels, and the City of London donated generously, and it was thus the great ransom was raised with which, some

days later, Abbot Samson set forth to the court of the Emperor of Germany.

CHAPTER XXX.

"Bell, book and candle,
Shall not drive me back,
When gold and silver becks me to come on."

ONE blustering March evening a messenger entered the gates of Westminster Palace. He was a churl of Oxfordshire, whom Prioress Rosamund had sent to her son with a message, summoning him to Godstowe, as the time was now ripe, Samson being absent from England, for the fulfillment of his wishes. Had Rosamund ended here, all might have gone well for Geoffrey, but a postscript proved his undoing, for she incautiously added "She is here, more fair than ever."

Now the Prioress' messenger arrived, cold and weary, on Queen Elinor's birthday, and on seeking the Palace kitchen, he there found ale and pasty in greater plenty than he had ever dreamed of; and sat late into the night, eating till he could eat no more, and drinking until he was too befuddled to attend on Chancellor Geoffrey. So, taking the advice of his fellow-revelers, he decided to let his message wait until the morrow, and nodded and drank, and drank and nodded, babbling of his Lady, the Prioress, and the beautiful gold-haired maid whom she had brought from the Suffolk Priory. Jocelin, coming in, was pierced to the heart by what the others took to be the ramblings of a drunken fool. As he watched the churl grow heavy with sleep, one idea ever recurred to him, — "What says

the message he carries?" Finally he led the messenger, nothing loth, to his cell, and gave him a place upon his pallet. The fellow was soon snoring in a drunken sleep, and Jocelin had little trouble to detach his pouch and take the Prioress' letter. Breaking its seal and untying its cord, he read it swiftly and understandingly, and then crumbling the missive as if its bending had broken the wax which sealed it, he retied it, and leaving the pouch opened, with the letter half falling from it, he dropped it on the straw beside the messenger and stole away, leaving him to sleep far into the morning.

Loud were the churl's lamentations when, on awakening, he found the marred missive. "Vile potleach that I am," he growled, "Now the foul fiend seize me, I must perforce have lain upon this accursed thing. Well, 'tis a buffeting for me at best, for take the missive to my Lord I must, or 'twould be ruin indeed," and so he sought de Clifford in fear and trembling, receiving the curses and blows of that irate gentleman philosophically. As the fellow assured Geoffrey that he had slept in an out-house, entirely alone, the Favorite consoled himself with the thought that none could have a motive for opening a message from his mother and that as the fellow was entirely unknown, his story, that he had lain on the missive and broken its seal, was probably true. "And Gramacy, what could any have made of it if they had read it?" murmured he, dismissing the churl with another buffet for his carelessness. Within an hour, however, he learned that something *could* be made of it, for his ready wit nearly deserted him when, as he entered Prince John's bedchamber, the Prince said

cheerily, after waving away his attendants, "So thou thought'st to put us to pot, ungrateful one. Go to! Shalt the subject be served ere the King? When thou goest to Godstowe thy brother will ride with thee! Ha, ha!" and he laughed heartily at the chagrined face before him. "The tiny bird chirped well when it brought this news, by my troth. I see 'tis true, and the maid hath been garnered for thee by thy careful mother, 'till now the time is ripe." Well, coz, we'll go incog to Godstowe soon. So frown not, sweet Geoff, but willingly divide the spoils. Remember the King's tithe."

So Chancellor Geoffrey had to make the best of it, but 'twas lucky for the messenger that he was safely gone ere the irate courtier rushed officeward in quest of him. As he fumed by, Jocelin peering at him from his little chamber, smiled grimly and thought as he paced its narrow bounds — "Abbot Samson once said, 'If the wolf smell blood, he will cease not till he track his prey.' Rohese, I doubted thee — mayhap I *doubt* thee still. An by God's eyes! Mine own hath taught me sore to doubt, yet thou may stand in need of aid. Ah, Mary mother! if I can look upon her face I'll know if she be innocent. But pure or foul, Rohese, I love thee still, and so mayhap whilst two dogs fight for the tempting brocale, a kite may snatch it yet away from out their yawning jaws."

In vain did Geoffrey assay to slip from the Palace. Once he had ridden as far as the Moorfields, when a captain of horse, with his soldiers, came upon him, and courteously requested his return to Westminster, as the Prince much desired his presence. So closely did John watch him

that after some weeks of ineffectual effort, Geoffrey sullenly desisted from his attempts, and awaited the royal pleasure. Yet "Let him look to himself," Geoffrey oft muttered when communing with himself. "More than once hath he flouted me and come off safely, but this time he entereth into the enemy's country. E'en though it were Richard himself, I will brook no interference in this. By the rood, he'll find it's no easy thing to turn a desperate man from his will. *If* John *arrives* at Godstowe, he shall be rendered harmless till this business be dispatched. A pleasant business 'tis I vow! Zounds, what white skin the wench hath! Her cheek is like a peach. I'll pay thee, haughty minx, for thy sneer. I'll cause salt tears to wash away thy bloom, and quench the lustre of thine agate eyes. 'Twill be sweet, by Jesu, to hear thee plead — 'Sweet sir, here's all my gold, pray wed me.' Yet, 'twere foolish to cast away so rare a mould. She'd make a perfect queen by Venus' zone, so when she's punished till she's meek, she shall have her boon, poor poppet. How round the contour of her limbs! Yea, a queen she'd be, with John and young Arthur up in Heaven, and Richard ne'er returned from Greifenstein (for if the Duke hath housed him with a lion, as he swore, old Samson'll find little there to ransom methinketh, save a pile of mumbled bones), then mayhap the bastard will turn king, who knoweth?"

Finally the Prince grew tired of tormenting his Favorite, and one morning late in March, he chose to speak to him privately as they stood in the tilt yard apart from the other gentlemen, and watched two jousters try their powers. With an injured look, John began: —

"What now, brother Geoff, hath forgotten our project of some days agone? Why hast put off so pleasant an journeying? Was't to spite me? Fie, that were churlishly done. Come, let us go to Godstowe on the morrow's eve. The thought of that white necked, cloistered wench hath set my blood crinkling all the morn. Tomorrow eve, then Geoff. 'Twill be all fools' day, a very fit one for such a junketing, eh coz?"

Geoffrey vainly tried to conceal his feelings, but John, watching him closely, paled as he caught a glimpse of the hatred which balefully lit his brother's eye; and continued as he moved away, forcedly jocular, "An' as 'tis all fools' day, coz, we'll take the fool to make three fools in this foolery."

The joust soon ended, when Prince John had departed; and Geoffrey was left alone in the tiltyard, where he paced with purturbed strides, careless that he could be seen from the many palace windows, cursing long and deep in his beard. "If this fool go," he thought, "'twill disarrange all planning, by my halidame,' 'twere easy to be rid of one, but two were hard to dispose of. 'Twould necessitate two fellows, yea, or three, to do the work, if I concluded then to make an ending o' it." And he strode into the Palace deeply thinking. Aimlessly turning down an unfrequented corridor, his attention was attracted by a noise outside, and looking from the casement into a small courtyard, he saw upcurved before him a man's naked emaciated shoulders, quivering under the lash, which was wielded steadily and well by a stalwart soldier. The thongs whistling through the air, cut the flesh cruelly, and

caused more than one groan to fall from the tightly set lips of the Prince's jester: for it was he who was being flogged, surrounded by a crowd of menials, some curious, some pleased, some indignant, but all accepting the flogging in a matter-of-fact way, as did Jocelin himself, who stood with straining muscles and quivering form striving to suppress all signs of suffering. In answer to Geoffrey's query, a passing varlet said: —

"My Lord, in sooth, I know not why the poor ninny is beaten. An usher told me, but since, that his Highness returned from the tiltyard in an angry mood, and for some offense the fool was ordered to be flogged," and the varlet passed on with a sympathy in his ruddy face he dared not express.

The flogging was not a lengthy one, however, for the soldier was a humane fellow, and soon poor Jocelin drew his clothing over his ridged flesh and went away to his cell to gain what comfort he could from his little friend, the ape, who sighed mournfully at his evident distress, and seemed striving to mitigate his suffering by such mute sympathy as animals can express.

Geoffrey nodded as he watched the jester creep away, then assuring himself that the corridor was empty, he drew forth a dagger curiously hilted with brass and jade. "'Twere good I found thee in the armory rack today, little prick-spur. Thou goadest mine ambition," and he laid the weapon across his side to measure the length of its blade. "Jesu, 'twill near go through a man! And now for the Fool. John hath flogged him sore of late, an' if I judge aright, he is a desperate villain, with something

dark and damnable 'neath his caperings which I can not quite fathom. Sometimes methinks he's a spy sent by France himself, for France so plots and counter-plots that God in Heaven knoweth not what spells he's weaving across the channel there. But nay. The fellow is too patient; he must come hither to do more than spy. Mayhap the wolf of Bury sent him here. Gramacy, now that I think o' it, he hath the look of a monk about him, and Samson liketh not John. Well, spy or what; or but just a ninny, who affecteth a melancholy stare, I'll see what lust of vengeance and red gold can do. If he'll be guided by me, he shall have wealth and a dukedom in fair Normandy; that is, if he come not upon an untimely end at Godstowe house a-drinking too much ale. Well, by the saints, he's in the mood to strike now if he ever will be, and if I succeed in pledging him into this deed I so long to see complete, yet which I dare not mine own self compass, why by his sudden taking off there'll be none save mine own leal heart to be my confidante. If John *will go* — I've said, if John will go to Godstowe, let him look well to himself."

CHAPTER XXXI.

"At Godstowe neare to Oxford Towne."

THE winter's snows had melted; the earth lay expectant of her lover, Spring. Frogs chanted discordant choruses along the Thames' edge, and the night seemed athrill with the flutter of unseen wings, as if all the tiny atoms animating the green beauty of living growing things, were moving unseen through the air down from the great Fountain head of Life into the fecundite glebe; there to nest, cradled safe, until the smile of spring should woo them forth again into the sunshine in thousand myriad shapes of buds, blossom and leaf.

The bells of Westminster had just rung two. Over the dreaming Palace the darkness closed down soft and warm like God's tender hand spread out above His earth-children, and the light of the stars peering through the interlaced clouds fell in softened glory through the sky, like His smile filtering through His finger chinks. 'Twas a night for lullabyes and love; yet, ere the last note of the bell died away, three men came out from a postern in Old Palace yard, turning down the winding lane to the river; and in their hearts raged like the fires of hell, — hatred, lust and murder.

They pushed off, rowing across the river almost to the other side, and keeping well in the deep shadows of the high wooded bank, they rowed silently and carefully up the stream, passing Westminster, and soon coming out to

where the river ran lonely and quiet beneath the trees of the Middlesex forest. Jocelin sat at the helm, and John and his brother rowed.

On the boat glided under the starlit sky, the occupants nursing their fell designs while lightly chatting, the Prince sometimes sang bits of tunes. And when, as the night wore away, and they had frequent recourse to their wine flasks, the three sang catches as they rowed along, with such good will that the dwellers of the lonely granges by which the river wound, turned uneasily in their beds, awakened by the burst of melody uprising from the water.

In the early dawning they went ashore at Windsor, a little hamlet nestling by Thames' side, with rude timbered houses scattered here and there, surrounded with trees and gardens clustering round the tower. The walls of the ancient fortification rising sternly from its chalk rock, loomed mistily in the uncertain light, its windows showing black, mere loopholes hung with ivy, wherein the rooks and starlings had long built unmolested.

They entered an Inn near Datchet mead, where they were welcomed as the bargemen, their disguise proclaimed them. The Prince had chosen the river route for their journey (though it was by far the longer), because there was no direct road from London to Oxford, on account of the Chiltern hills; then too, along the river were stationed rude little inns for the accommodation of bargemen, and these afforded facilities for entertainment such as could not be found on the overland journey save at an occasional monastery.

Their river journey was uneventful, and they came at

last, one evening just at dusk, to Oxford, and disembarking at the slimy causeway, they passed through its crooked, dirty streets, coming to the northern gate as it was closing for the night. A little silver caused the keeper to cheerfully reopen it again, and it was not long ere they were at Beaumont Palace, outside the northern wall of the town, where Queen Elinor kept a small retinue of servants in such parts of the building as were occasionally used by her. Here John had decreed that he and Geoffrey tarry awhile to discard their rough disguise for fairer garb ere they went to the Nunnery, while Jocelin was sent ahead to apprise the Prioress of their coming.

Geoffrey followed him as he left the Palace, and stopping him outside the gate, said between his teeth — "Pitlikins! Sir Fool, thou art but a sorry craven! Thou hast failed to fulfil thy promise, sirrah! Twice couldst have done the deed, once at Willingford as he walked to board in the dawning; once as he slept within the boat, whilst we floated through that lonely, sedgy stretch of flats. And there, by the rood, well weighted, thou couldst have thrown him in the marsh, and none save thou and I wouldst have known till doomsday where he lay."

Jocelin replied sullenly — "If thou wishest it so keenly, my Lord, why not compass his taking off thyself? I will strike at the fitting time, mesaid; the narrow lane outside Godstowe would be a fitting spot, but look ye, sir, I'll choose the time myself."

"Ha! Thou growest insolent, thou rump-fed braggart. Dost forget who heard thee cry, 'O Jesu, give him to mine hands! Deliver thou mine enemy to me!?' Beware, *faise*

fool, for more than fool thou art, lest I cry forth a treason to the Prince, and tell of plots to murder him, an' then we'll see thee hanged as high as Haman for the plotting!"

"Fear not, sir; I will fail thee not!"

"Well, then, he must not bide long at Godstowe, Fool!" replied Geoffrey.

"*I'll strike when time is fit*," repeated Jocelin monotonously, leaving Geoffrey to reenter the gate, wondering at this queer buffoon, little thinking that the prayer for vengeance which he had overheard was not directed against John, and that the jester had no intention of murdering the Prince.

On the way to Oxford, Jocelin had learned from the brothers' careless speech of the intent of their journey, and since the first shock and horror arising from the knowledge of their designs had passed, he moved like one in a dream, performing mechanically the functions of life, while within him his brain was dead to all exterior impressions, for his mind revolved around but one thought. As in a great circle of light, Rohese stood out an innocent captive, deserted by all, doubted by *him*, betrayed into the hands of Geoffrey de Clifford by a cruel and wicked woman.

"Ah, Jesu, and all the while I doubted her. 'Twas Rosamund whom I saw at Benedict's" Jocelin kept repeating stupidly to himself, as he rode through the darkness. He did not believe that Geoffrey would yield up his prize to John, or trust to the fool's implied threat to murder him in the lane. Thus he hardly looked for the Prince to arrive at the Nunnery. It was with Geoffrey he had to deal, and as he passed down the lane which skirted Godstowe, Jocelin

drew rein beneath the beetling walls of the Nunnery, and took forth the dagger Geoffrey had given him. Kissing it reverently, he made the sign of the cross with it in the air, and murmured, with his hand still uplifted — "May God do for me as I do for thee, Rohese! I now devote this dagger to thy cause. I'll stand between thee and dishonor, and if my poor life yielded up, can save thee from one leacherous glance of that thrice-damned cur, I'll say amen. For, by the rood, what better death could *any* die than in defense of thee!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

"A bad woman is Hell's best tool."

WHILST the ransomed King, attended by his fellow-prisoner, in company with Abbot Samson, set foot on his native land, (a King coming to his own again), in far off Godstowe a poor maid fought a losing fight; and fluttered ineffectually in the talons of the birds of prey which swooped down upon her.

A few hours after the advent of John and Geoffrey at the Nunnery, Rohese was awakened by a light within her chamber, and started up in alarm to find the Prioress Rosamund standing beside her couch, with a white robe over her arm, and a small open casket of jewels in her hand. She was smiling, though behind her smile lurked a menace.

"Awake," she cried in gay accents, as she held up the gems that Rohese might note their sparkle. "Come, Lady de Cokefeld, the chapel is all alight and warm, as even is thy waiting bridegroom."

"Bridegroom?" queried Rohese wonderingly, not yet fully awake.

"Yea, poppet, and thou must haste to robe thyself, for he says he'll give thee half an hour by the glass, and if thou'rt not come to him then, he swears by all the saints in Heaven to drag thee to the altar in thy night rail, and marry thee so-willa-nilla. So rise, Rohese, and by my troth, I'll act tiremaid unto my daughter that soon will be."

"Thy daughter, madam! What mean ye? Is De Clifford here?" and Rohese sprang from her couch in anger. "I told thee I'd not wed thy son!" and she stamped her bare foot as she pushed away the hand which held out to her the bridal array.

"And I told thee, thou fool, that Geoffrey was to be thy lord," answered the Prioress, in no way moved by Rohese's emotion, setting the jewels upon the girl's dressing table, and arranging her toilet utensils with a skillful hand. "Come, garb thee, for thou'lt be a-cold."

"But thou saidst some time agone thou did repent thy pressing of this suit," stammered Rohese, standing staring at her with wide eyes.

"I *said!* Mary mother! Thou poor unfledged bird! And at thy age, wench, I'd conquered Henry so he'd tremble at my frown. What matter what I *said. Now* I say thy bridegroom waits, and Father Simon's at the shrine to make two one; so haste thee, hussy, haste; for though Geoff's mother is patient as Grizselda, *he'll* not wait, and he's been drinking deep this hour, so do not cross him, girl, I warn thee!"

Rohese did not move. She stood statue-like, her blazing eyes, like those of some accusing angel, turned on Rosamund de Clifford. "And dost think to cozen me into such a marriage? Dost think to cross the eagle with the kite, to foul the blood which for centuries De Cokefeld's knights have died to keep from stain? Nay, Madam, I'll not don thy bridal gown. 'Tis good of thee to bring to me what *thou dispensed with* when getting thy son! Go to, thou false and wicked thing; thou wanton gaud of many men.

I'll not wed thy bastard, Rosamund de Clifford; go thou and tell him so." Rosamund bit her nails as the maid scornfully uttered these scathing words, and two livid spots showed beside each curling nostril. Whosoe'er saw those finger prints of Satan on her face had ever ample cause to rue he brought them there.

"Art done, thy essence of purebloodedness? Then listen; my son stands now in need of gold; so know ye, noble maid, that 'tis not for the glitter of thine empty head he wishes thee; and there is not another way by which he can raise a halfling, save by espousing thee, so wed him thou surely shalt. Thou art here with *me*, remember wench, and thy churlish Abbot is in Germany. Why now, little shrew, be thou wise. Richard's surely dead ere this, and naught but two puny lives stand between my Geoffrey and the throne. Come, make thee ready for the nuptials, girl, and I'll forgive thy spitefulness. 'Tis but the sourness of an unripe fruit. Haste thee, for the moments run."

"Thou heard'st my decision, Madam, so vex me not with importunities. Why, I'd take the veil and bend beneath thy reign my whole life long, and empty all my fortune at thy feet ere I would soil my hands by *touching* such a villain as thy son. Fit son of such a mother."

The gold-flecked eyes of the Prioress narrowed, straighter and straighter drew the line of her scarlet mouth. "Thy veiling, or thy death would benefit us not, else would I ne'er have picked out such a fiendish shrew to sit beside my son upon a throne. Hast no ambition, fool? Why, thou gawky, country wench, thou shalt be Queen of England in a year."

Rohese laughed scornfully. "Nay, lady, wed me to an ape, and crown me with a rowan bough. Even should thy plottings win; King Richard die by murderous hand, and John and Arthur follow after him; there are still brave hearts in England who will not trust her sceptre to a pander's paddling hand. Weary me no more, woman; I'll have none of thee or thine."

Rosamund sprang forward like a tigress, furious with rage, and shook the girl violently. "Thou adder tongue, I could strangle thee where thou standest. But no, there is a better end for thee. By all fair measures I have urged along our suit, and now, sweet virgin piece of purity, thou shalt most dearly pay for all thy insults, and thy haughty airs. John sits below drunk, while Geoffrey and a buffoon drink and sing the songs of London's stews. As thou hast so coquetted and hung back, we'll let them brush off some of this bloom of sweet virginity, and see if by the morrow's sun thou wilt not beg for *any* churl to marry thee. "Come enter, Sister Isopel."

Thus called, the burly virago came through the door; her red face all agrin, leering upon the horrified girl, whilst the Prioress continued smiling pleasantly.

"Now, Sister Isopel, we'll take this pretty tidbit to the lions. Rohese's white lips parted.

"Great God," she panted, "art thou a woman, and wouldst threaten a maid with such monstrosity? Thou wouldst not *dare!*" Then gazing from one malignant face to the other, she fully realized their determination. "Help, help," she cried.

"Yea, cry the louder, that they may come to thee more surely, O lily maid," sneered Rosamund.

"O Isopel, save me, Isopel!" entreated the girl. "Thou wilt not let such infamy be! Hate me, torture me, I'll not complain, but for the love of God's pure mother, let this not be done for sake of womanhood. O, think ye what ye do! O thou, mine bitter enemy, forgive my bitter words. I'll wed thy son, and bow to thy decree. Come, put the wedding garb upon me; see, we'll deck the bride in bright array," and with a pitiful attempt at playful haste, the poor maid began to arrange the bridal dress.

"Isopel stepped aside with an inquiring look at the Prioress, but she frowned with a hateful shake of her head. And the two stood grimly by until the maid had finished her toilet.

"Now, I am ready for the bridal, Lady," said she with a frightened glance at them. Rosamund spoke —

"Thou shalt dispense with it, *as I*, Madam, for a season, at least. Thou hast tried me too far. Come, Isopel," and despite the frantic efforts of the maid, the elder women easily carried her down the dimly lit corridors to the apartments where the drunken men caroused, and thrust her into Geoffrey's bedchamber. As they turned away, Isopel laid her rough hand on the slender arm of the Prioress —

"Madam," she said in a strained voice, "I have served thee well these many years, but this I cannot stomach. Let me go back to Suffolk and take the wench. I'll soon dispose of her. A sip of wine, a bit of wassel-cake. 'Tis easy done. By God's true eyes, this is too damned a deed

for me. Let us remove the maid ere they're aware of her. They do carouse in the larger room, and the bedchamber is unlit." Rosamund laughed. She was in high good humor.

"Get thee to bed, gossip; thou art old, and the night groweth late. Tell our Chaplain that he need not wait; the lady is not yet quite ready for the bridal. By the rood, but thou, who hath nested safe with Simon this many a day, thou art an ancient light o' love to preach virtue to thy superior! Good night; my benison on thee, sister dear," and Rosamund paused to watch the nun go slowly away; then entering her own chamber, she made ready for bed humming a gay French chason.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"But an thei dye a soden dethes
With outen schrifts or penans;
To hell thei gow, withouten les,
Ffor thei can chese no nothur chaunce."

JOHN, Geoffrey and Jocelin had just supped in the red tapestried room which opened on the favorite's bedchamber. The Prince leaned upon the table at one end, with Geoffrey across from him, and Jocelin, lute in hand, on a low stool by his side. The table was covered with food, interspersed with flagons of wine, which Geoffrey and John had been endeavoring to empty, each trying to out-drink the other. John was becoming stupified and sat huddled in his chair, a vacant smile on his face, his blood-shot eyes roving aimlessly about the room, his rich garments stained with the drippings of food and wine. He was in that state of intoxication when a man is pleased with himself and all the world.

Geoffrey, on the other hand, was silent and morose. Wine never reddened his face, or thickened his tongue.

Jocelin sat, silent and watchful, his strained ear catching every sound. No rustle of the tapestry, no squeak rat in the wainscoating escaped him; for, lurking behind the Prince in the darkness of the corridor, he had heard the Prioress promise to speedily bring Rohese hither, and sat, like Geoffrey, waiting for the hour of her coming.

The Prince babbled and forgot the songs he tried to

sing but he still retained consciousness until Geoffrey took a drugged cup of wine, which had hitherto set at his place, and pressed it on his brother, smiling to note its speedy effect, and when John had sunk across the table oblivious to everything—the Favorite said:—

"And now, Sir Fool, that he is well disposed of — God wot I wish the drug so dire that he should never wake! And if when I leave this chamber he were spirited away, and with brother Simon's friendly aid, thrown into a certain pit (the monk knows of), a Dukedom's waiting on it, sirrah." Jocelin took up his lute and drew his hand lightly across its strings making discordant sounds.

"The hour grows late," continued the Bastard, "God's blood, these women are long in coming. Sing, thou fool, somewhat to pass the tedious time away. I'm all afire; it seems as if I should suffocate," and Geoffrey rose and loosened his doublet, as he threw open one of the long, low windows. Jocelin's minor chords throbbed through the room. The arras swayed in the April breeze; the silver-bowed moon low-anchored in the blue night sky, gleamed through the giant elms outside; the tapers flared in the draught, sending uncertain shadows flickering across the face of the musician, who, cap and bells doffed, bent his grotesquely painted face over the lute, softly singing:

The afternoon of night!
And my wee white whimpering hound
Crouches at my feet in fear; —
For in the thicket and in the fen,
Red with the blood of murdered men,

The sickly pallid corpse-lights gleam
Across the reedy mere.

Not one faint star eye blinks
Above the dank, black earth;
The bare branches creak in the breeze
That's heavy with mist, like tears late shed,
For the missing lover, the murdered dead;
And the wind wails by with shudder and shriek
As if it knew what lay under the trees.

I know, and my wee white whimpering hound;
I know, and the dank earth knows as well,
For the sere grass reeks with thy traitor blood,
All plucked from the sod by thy clutching hands—
Ah now, what availeth thee title and lands?
For thou liest out there all stiff and stark,
And I shall stand where thou late hast stood."

Geoffrey called out roughly, with an irrepressible shudder — "Ods bodkins, fool, thou choosest an horrid strain. Bah, the night grows chill!" and he turned to close the lattice. As he did so, a door beyond opened and a smothered cry came from his bedchamber. Geoffrey turned to Jocelin, "Now get thee gone, fellow. Dost not envy what waits me in yonder room?" (But Jocelin had disappeared.) "The fool's a very eel. He slipped away as stilly as a shadow," exclaimed the Favorite, staring about him heavily.

"Well, well, the sooner gone the better, for I am all

aflame to teach a haughty wench to know her master."

"Art there, Rohese? Come forth and sit upon my knee; there's wine left yet and plenty, and the Prince sleepeth, my chucky, so he cannot witness our endearments."

"What, dost sulk, lady?" he continued tauntingly, "Or art thou bashful? Nay, my kisses shall ease thee of all shamefacedness, and thou shalt cool thy blushes in my rapturous tears. Come forth, sweet, and I'll reveal to thee all the joys of love." There was silence, save for the breathing of the sleeping Prince.

"Alackaday," cried Geoffrey, in feigned contrition. "See now how I've hung back, not chivalrously, mefears. Ods bodkins! By the rood, thou white-breasted swan, I'm not inclined to dally long, or play the suitor, so madam, if thou'lt not come forth to feast mine ardent eyes, I'll come and soon strip thee of thy coquettry. Kisses are but the sweeter in the dark," and Geoffrey walked toward the dark doorway.

When Rohese was thrust into Geoffrey's chamber, she saw through the half-open door, the sleeping Prince, the bulky form of Geoffrey at the casement, and a slender motley-clad figure slipping silently toward her. On it came, quickly, warily through the half-closed door, without stirring it a hair-breadth, and in a second a hand was on her arm; a well-known voice breathed in her ear — "Rohese," and her heart gave a hopeful throb as she recognized Jocelin.

"Quick," he whispered, "ensconce thee behind the door." As she obeyed, he stole silently to the couch and wrapped himself in its coverings, just as Geoffrey came striding in,

pushing the door back impatiently, letting in a little light from the low burning tapers.

"Ah, minion," cried he. "Come now, no more feigned modesty; unwrap thee, sweet, and come thou forth to me," so saying he bent over the bed to throw off its covering. Jocelin, lying waiting there in the darkness, for one brief second, had the smell of fresh blood in his nostrils, a red mist swam before his eyes, whilst his heart sang within him, "I shall kill him, I shall kill him;" and as Geoffrey bending lower, impatiently twitched the coverlet aside, Jocelin, with a snarl of hatred, sprang upward, clutching at his throat, driving the dagger through him; and Geoffrey taken by surprise, had only time to cry, "Villain," and draw forth the dagger, ere he fell across the couch — dead.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

"Once more shall the coming spring restore
What the winter rude hath taken."

"He is dead, quite dead, Rohese," said Jocelin composedly, as he followed her from the room. He felt no compunction, no horror at what he had done. The past months had been a sort of apprenticeship for this deed. From the hour, when in Bradfield's hall, the Bastard had been proffered as Rohese's husband, until, with time and favorable circumstances, it culminated in murder.

As he paused in the doorway to look backward into the shadowy room where his enemy lay, he murmured as one who breathes a heartfelt prayer — "Jubilate! The world is quit of thee, through me!"

Rohese sank into a chair, sobbing convulsively. Jocelin soothing her gently, brought wine from the disordered table; and when she was calm again said:

"Dear Lady, we are in God's hands, to Whom be praise that He hath brought low our enemy. So if it be His will, we shall walk safely from this den of infamy. Come, wrap thee in my cloak, and speak not, no matter what betides."

The tapers guttered in their sconces; the atmosphere of the room reeked with wine; the drunken Prince snored; his head upon the table, as dead to the world as his brother, who lay yonder in the darkness, his licentious hand still grasping the covering which he had so hotly snatched but a moment since, from his intended victim.

Brother Simon dozed on guard in the vestibule, but he started up as Rohese and Jocelin approached. "Benedicite, brother," said Jocelin.

"Benedicite, fool," answered he good-naturedly enough, though he was still drowsy.

"Unbar the door, good Simon. I'm to the stables, for I've letters to carry to the Inn by the causeway, and this wench to convey to Beaumont, willa, nilla." Simon complied slowly, leering sleepily at Rohese the while. To Jocelin it seemed as if hours passed ere he drew the great bolt.

"Hasten, brother," he urged. "'Tis near on to the second cock-crow, and no sleep have I had this night. So by the rood, I would quick dispatch this business." Simon let down the bolt, and turned the door knob. It had begun to swing open when a step sounded and a woman with a taper in her hand came toward them, peering through the hall but faintly lighted by an iron lamp hanging high from its vaulted ceiling.

"Ah!" cried Rohese softly, and Jocelin, startled by her exclamation, turned and saw Sister Isopel. "Ah well, all's over now. Praise God, at least, Rohese can never be the lehman of De Clifford," he thought.

"What is't, Simon? Wait," called Isopel in a cautious voice. Simon, with the chill night air blowing upon his bare legs, stood frowning until she came up, then he said sulkily:

"Letters to carry, and the wench too. 'Tis thy late charge. They're sending her to Beaumont."

"O Isopel," murmured Rohese, stretching out a tremulou s

hand toward the great nun. There was a world of entreaty in the sound, and her pallid tear-stained young face looked out from its dark wrappings in an agony of supplication. Isopel hesitated. Conscience had kept her awake this night, for hardened as she was, the cold-blooded wickedness of the Prioress had sickened her. Quicker than Simon, her keener brain suspicioned that in some way Jocelin had contrived the girl's rescue, and she thought that it would be but a moment ere the convent would be about their ears. It was no light thing to incur the ire of the Prioress Rosamund, she knew, so she hesitated a moment, and then — all honor to this bad and violent woman, she gave Rohese a rude pat on the arm, and, commanding Simon to hasten, she closed the door after them.

The darkness of the last hours of night lay over the earth, as Rohese and Jocelin rode swiftly from Godstowe They spoke little, save that Jocelin told her he purposed making for Bradfield, in hope that the Abbot was returned.

Full nearly an hundred miles lay between them and their destination, and they knew that but a few hours' start was all that they could hope for; so, turning northeast they rode till morning, when they paused at a brook, and Jocelin washed his painted face, and doffed his jester's garb, for next his body he had worn the black habit of his order. By day, at Westminster, he had been Tom o' Fools, but by night, locked in his chamber, he was always Jocelin de Brakelonda, the renegade monk of St. Edmunds.

The country between Oxford and Bury was but thinly inhabited, so they passed on unchallenged, and by avoiding the far-scattered granges and manors, they escaped the

observation of any save a few churls, (shepherds or ploughmen), at whose rude huts they found food and shelter.

They rode onward in safety; greeted on every side by all the sweet, shy beauty of budding April; the blue speedwell bidding them "God speed;" the violet hiding her head that she might not spy on them; the laburnums glowing the redder as they passed, and the lark singing high in the blue above them, of hope and joy.

Through Buckinghamshire they went, Bedford, Hertford, Cambridge and Suffolk, and at last, one bright morning, they again rode together beneath the Abbey walls, and entered the gates of Bradfield house.

Bradfield was in gala array; banners floated in the sunshine, and pennants streamed forth from all the towers; soldiers stood on guard in the courtyard, and from inside the palace came the sound of pipe and tabor, rehearsing triumphal music.

Brother Tristian and others worked in the great hall chattering like magpies over the decorations; for they were hanging the room with brocades and rare tapestries, and had decked it with garlands. The old man was turning from the group, when the hammer dropped from his hand, as his gaze rested on the entering pair, and he cried in sort of joyous terror, "'Tis Jocelin, by the rood, 'tis Jocelin!"

Then all was commotion, exclamations and questionings, but Jocelin answered them not, asking that the Prior be brought. When he had come, gaping wide as the rest, he listened in silence to Jocelin's hurried explanations, and ordered the Gate-chamber prepared for the Lady de

Cokefeld, and Jocelin to return to his own cell, long left untenanted.

Rohese, ensconced in the familiar chamber, hastened to fling herself upon her couch, and slept soundly till late in the afternoon.

It was just at sunset that the sound of distant bugles awoke her. And then the tramp of horses, and the halooing of men outside the gate sent her hurrying to the casement, where she sat looking out, her heart beating high with the excitement of the Abbot's home-coming, for the monks had told them that Samson returned from Germany with Richard; had landed safely at Dover, and would reach Bradfield that very night.

Rohese leaned out. The sky was incarnadined; purple and gold clouds lay massed above the great gateway. In the woods behind Bradfield, the shimmering green of the budding trees seemed to hang illusive, as if not yet decided to glorify the waiting boughs. The perfume of apple-blossoms was wafted from the Abbey garden, and everything seemed athrill with joyful expectancy.

A crowd of monks, with music and laughter, streamed down the marble steps of the palace, across the courtyard, below her, and formed in long lines on each side of the gates as they were flung open; and Samson, returned successful from his mission, garbed in regal purple, his great beard lying far down on his broad breast, his ruddy face lit with benignant smiles, rode into the courtyard.

He was followed by a retinue, headed by a young knight who, with casque back from his face, sat his horse, towering above his companions. His countenance, marked

by experience and suffering, bore the stamp of strength and power; but his stern features were softened by a pair of blue eyes as deep and tender as a doe's.

It was Henry of Leicester, liberated from his imprisonment with the King, who had come to partake of the Abbot's hospitality before entering into possession of his inheritance.

As if drawn by Rohese's gaze, he glanced upward and bowed low, his face glorified by passionate joy, his eyes feasting upon the maid he had never ceased to love through all the long time of his absence and imprisonment.

Rohese, meeting his gaze, went white and red by turns, and sat with one hand pressed to her swelling heart, smiling a welcome to him. Such a smile as only a proud and happy woman can bestow upon the conqueror of her heart who had come back, as from the grave, to claim his own It was a smile which curved the lip and mantled the cheek with blushes, while it wooed the tears from her shining eyes, and sent them over her cheek like dewdrops dripping over pink rose petals.

Then the train withdrew into the palace, and Rohese, her heart throbbing with wild exultation, paced her chamber in all the ecstasy of resurrected hope and joy.

CHAPTER XXXV.

"Like fading shadows we depart,
O brother of a broken heart;
Let sorrow blossom into peace."

If John and Rosamund, clamoring at King Richard's feet for vengeance on the Bastard's murderer, ever succeeded in connecting Tom o' Fools with the monk of Bury, the King and Abbot did not aid in following up the clue; and so all trace of the Prince's jester was lost, and John ever after moved under a cloud of suspicion of having slain Geoffrey de Clifford in a drunken brawl.

In the general rejoicing at St. Edmunds, Jocelin sat in his cell, a creature apart. Joy was not for him. All he could ever hope for was a certain degree of calmness of soul, with which he might accept with resignation, the life stretching before him in shadowy vistas, unlighted by any glint of that happiness which, snatching at, he had wrecked his life's craft with all the golden argosies desire had launched so hopefully.

Abbot Samson, while pardoning his erstwhile favorite on account of the intercession of Rohese and Henry, decreed that he should become a Recluse. Indeed, he was shunned by most of the brethren who believed him in league with Satan, on account of his mysterious escape; and the rest, headed by old Tristian, held aloof from him as one set apart from mankind, by that miracle which the Saints wrought in his behalf.

Rohese dreamed true in the desolate Priory chamber. Thus, after weary years of waiting, fulfilling her dead father's prophecy. When she stood at Henry's side, and the Abbot, his rich pontificals blazing in the light of the altar, had wedded them, from the fretted choir above came a burst of music, and Rohese, looking up, saw Jocelin for the last time. He was seated at the organ, the pierce-work of its dark carved screen framing the black-robed figure, and white face, with passionate eyes uplifted in an agony of renunciation.

Thus Jocelin played the bridal processional of the woman he loved. In it echoed the despair of hopeless passion, the throbbing joy of love fulfilled, and ever through all, the tonic was sustained, like the voice of one who sang, with breaking heart, a sad farewell; whilst the other parts moved on in glad and stately chorus, presaging bliss, prosperity, and the founding of a long and noble line. The light from a window fell upon the musician in a radiant stream, and Rohese wondered if the two angels of her dream hovered there. But she saw naught save the golden motes dancing in the sunshine.

COOKE DON-CARLOS.

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